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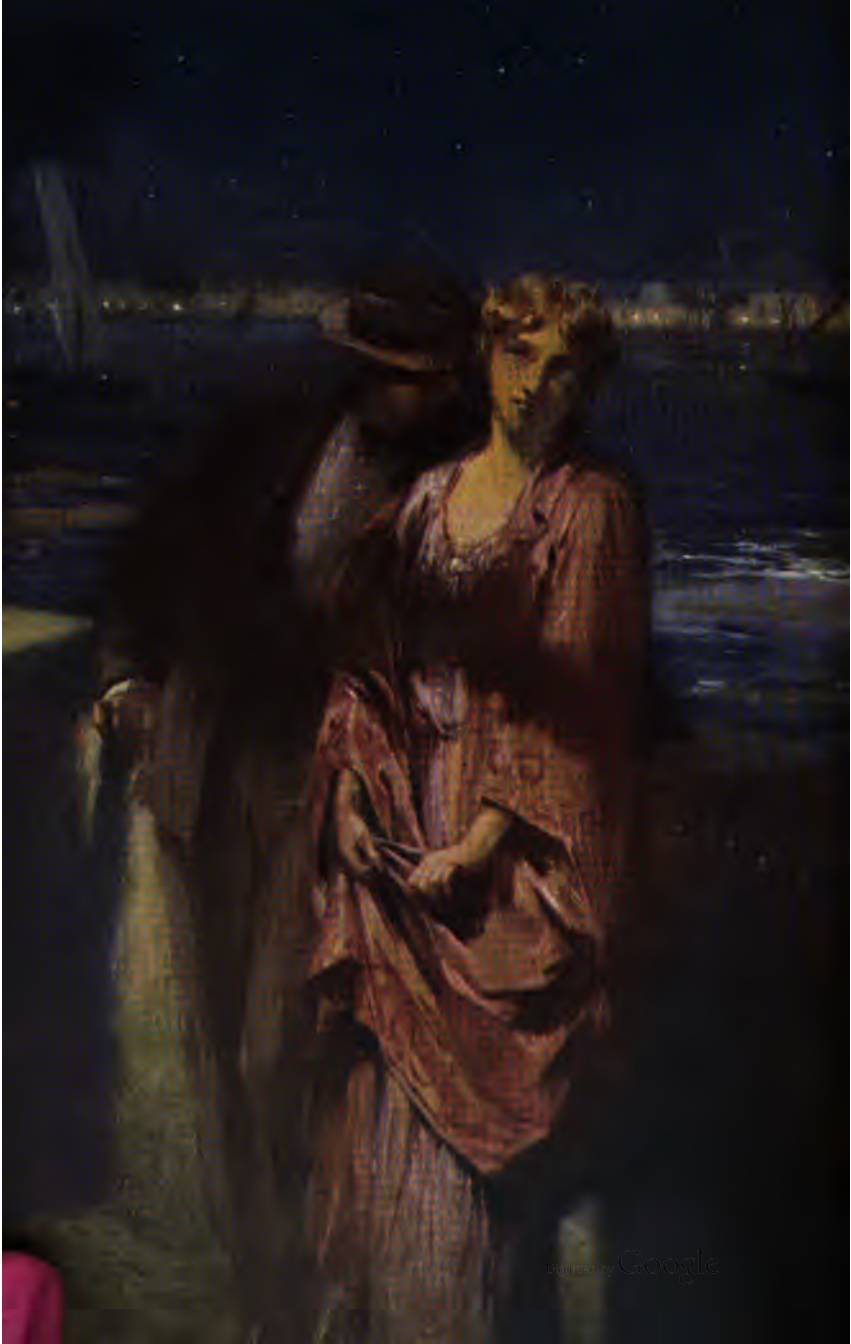
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THE CARPET FROM BAGDAD

By

HAROLD MACGRATH

Author of

A SPLENDID HAZARD
THE MAN ON THE BOX

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY

ANDRE CASTAIGNE

INDIANAPOLIS
THE BOBBS-MERRILL COMPANY
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TO

ROBERT HICHENS

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The wild hawk to the windswept sky,
The deer to the wholesome wold,
And the heart of a man to the heart of a maid,
As it was in the days of old.

—Rudyard Kipling.

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The Carpet From Bagdad

CHAPTER I

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

TO POSSESS two distinctly alien red corpuscles in one's blood, metaphorically if not in fact, two characters or individualities under one epidermis, is, in most cases, a peculiar disadvantage. One hears of scoundrels and saints striving to consume one another in one body, angels and harpies; but ofttimes, quite the contrary to being a curse, these two warring temperaments become a man's ultimate blessing: as in the case of George P. A. Jones, of Mortimer & Jones, the great metropolitan Oriental rug and carpet company, all of which has a dignified, sonorous sound. George was divided within himself. This he would not have confessed even into the trusted if battered ear of the Egyptian Sphynx. There was, however, no demon-angel sparring for

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points in George's soul. The difficulty might be set forth in this manner: On one side stood inherent common sense; on the other, a boundless, roseate imagination which was likewise inherent—a kind of quixote imagination of suitable modern pattern. This *alter ego* terrified him whenever it raised its strangely beautiful head and shouldered aside his guardian-angel (for that's what common sense is, argue to what end you will) and pleaded in that luminous rhetoric under the spell of which our old friend Sancho often fell asleep.

P. A., as they called him behind the counters, was but twenty-eight, and if he was vice-president in his late father's shoes he didn't wabble round in them to any great extent. In a crowd he was not noticeable; he didn't stand head and shoulders above his fellow-men, nor would he have been mistaken by near-sighted persons, the myopes, for the Vatican's Apollo in the flesh. He was of medium height, beardless, slender, but tough and wiry and enduring. You may see his prototype on the streets a dozen times the day, and you may also pass him without turning round for a second view. Young men like P. A. must be intimately known to be admired; you

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did not throw your arm across his neck, first-off. His hair was brown and closely clipped about a head that would have gained the attention of the phrenologist, if not that of the casual passer-by. His bumps, in the phraseology of that science, were good ones. For the rest, he observed the world through a pair of kindly, shy, blue eyes.

Young girls, myopic through ignorance or silliness, seeing nothing beyond what the eyes see, seldom gave him a second inspection; for he did not know how to make himself attractive, and was mortally afraid of the opposite, or opposing, sex. He could bully-rag a sheik out of his camels' saddle-bags, but petticoats and lace parasols and small Oxfords had the same effect upon him that the prodding stick of a small boy has upon a retiring turtle. But many a worldly-wise woman, drawing out with tact and kindness the truly beautiful thoughts of this young man's soul, sadly demanded of fate why a sweet, clean boy like this one had not been sent to her in her youth. You see, the worldly-wise woman knows that it is invariably the lay-figure and not Prince Charming that a woman marries, and that matrimony is blindman's-buff for grown-ups.

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Many of us lay the blame upon our parents. We shift the burden of wondering why we have this fault and lack that grace to the shoulders of our immediate forebears. We go to the office each morning denying that we have any responsibility; we let the boss do the worrying. But George never went prospecting in his soul for any such dross philosophy. He was grateful for having had so beautiful a mother; proud of having had so honest a sire; and if either of them had endued him with false weights he did his best to even up the balance.

The mother had been as romantic as any heroine out of Mrs. Radcliff's novels, while the father had owned to as much romance as one generally finds in a thorough business man, which is practically none at all. The very name itself is a bulwark against the intrusions of romance. One can not lift the imagination to the prospect of picturing a Jones in ruffles and highboots, pinking a varlet in the midriff. It smells of sugar-barrels and cotton-bales, of steamships and railroads, of stolid routine in the office and of placid concern over the daily news under the evening lamp.

Mrs. Jones, lovely, lettered yet not worldly, had

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dreamed of her boy, bayed and decorated, marrying the most distinguished woman in all Europe, whoever she might be. Mr. Jones had had no dreams at all, and had put the boy to work in the shipping department a little while after the college threshold had been crossed, outward bound. The mother, while sweet and gentle, had a will, iron under velvet, and when she held out for Percival Algernon and a decent knowledge of modern languages, the old man agreed if, on the other hand, the boy's first name should be George and that he should learn the business from the cellar up. There were several tilts over the matter, but at length a truce was declared. It was agreed that the boy himself ought to have a word to say upon a subject which concerned him more vitally than any one else. So, at the age of fifteen, when he was starting off for preparatory school, he was advised to choose for himself. He was an obedient son, adoring his mother and idolizing his father. He wrote himself down as George Percival Algernon Jones, promised to become a linguist and to learn the rug business from the cellar up. On the face of it, it looked like a big job; it all depended upon the boy.

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The first day at school his misery began. He had signed himself as George P. A. Jones, no small diplomacy for a lad; but the two initials, standing up like dismantled pines in the midst of uninteresting landscape, roused the curiosity of his schoolmates. Boys are boys the world over, and possess a finesse in cruelty that only the Indian can match; and it did not take them long to unearth the fatal secret. For three years he was Percy Algy, and not only the boys laughed, but the pretty girls sniggered. Many a time he had returned to his dormitory decorated (not in accord with the fond hopes of his mother) with a swollen ear, or a ruddy proboscis, or a green-brown eye. There was a limit, and when they stepped over that, why, he proceeded to the best of his ability to solve the difficulty with his fists. George was no milksop; but Percival Algernon would have been the Old Man of the Sea on broader shoulders than his. He dimly realized that had he been named George Henry William Jones his sun would have been many diameters larger. There was a splendid quality of pluck under his apparent timidity, and he stuck doggedly to it. He never wrote home and

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complained. What was good enough for his mother was good enough for him.

It seemed just an ordinary matter of routine for him to pick up French and German verbs. He was far from being brilliant, but he was sensitive and his memory was sound. Since his mother's ambition was to see him an accomplished linguist, he applied himself to the task as if everything in the world depended upon it, just as he knew that when the time came he would apply himself as thoroughly to the question of rugs and carpets.

Under all this filial loyalty ran the pure strain of golden romance, side by side with the lesser metal of practicality. When he began to read the masters he preferred their romances to their novels. He even wrote poetry in secret, and when his mother discovered the fact she cried over the sentimental verses. The father had to be told. He laughed and declared that the boy would some day develop into a good writer of advertisements. This quiet laughter, unburdened as it was with ridicule, was enough to set George's muse a-winging, and she never came back.

After leaving college he was given a modest letter

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of credit and told to go where he pleased for a whole year. George started out at once in quest of the Holy Grail, and there are more roads to that than there are to Rome. One may be reasonably sure of getting into Rome, whereas the Holy Grail (diversified, variable, innumerable) is always the exact sum of a bunch of hay hanging before old Dobbin's nose. Nevertheless, George galloped his fancies with loose rein. He haunted the romantic quarters of the globe; he hunted romance, burrowed and plowed for it; and never his spade clanged musically against the hidden treasure, never a forlorn beauty in distress, not so much as chapter one of the Golden Book offered its dazzling first page. George lost some confidence.

Two or three times a woman looked into the young man's mind, and in his guilelessness they effected sundry holes in his letter of credit, but left his soul singularly untouched. The red corpuscle, his father's gift, though it lay dormant, subconsciously erected barriers. He was innocent, but he was no fool. That one year taught him the lesson, rather cheaply, too. If there was any romance in life, it came uninvited, and if courted and sought

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was as quick on the wing as that erstwhile poesy muse.

The year passed, and while he had not wholly given up the quest, the practical George agreed with the romantic Percival to shelve it indefinitely. He returned to New York with thirty-pounds sterling out of the original thousand, a fact that rejuvenated his paternal parent by some ten years.

"Jane, that boy is all right. Percival Algernon could not kill a boy like that."

"Do you mean to infer that it ever could?" Sometimes a qualm wrinkled her conscience. Her mother's heart told her that her son ought not to be shy and bashful, that it was not in the nature of his blood to suspect ridicule where there was none. Perhaps she had handicapped him with those names; but it was too late now to admit of this, and useless, since it would not have remedied the evil.

Jones hemmed and hawed for a space. "No," he answered; "but I was afraid he might try to live up to it; and no Percival Algernon who lived up to it could put his nose down to a Shah Abbas and tell how many knots it had to the square inch. I'll start him in on the job to-morrow."

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Whereupon the mother sat back dreamily. Now, where was the girl worthy her boy? Monumental question, besetting every mother, from Eve down, Eve, whose trials in this direction must have been heartrending!

George left the cellar in due time, and after that he went up the ladder in bounds, on his own merit, mind you, for his father never stirred a hand to boost him. He took the interest in rugs that turns a buyer into a collector; it became a fascinating pleasure rather than a business. He became invaluable to the house, and acquired some fame as a judge and an appraiser. When the chief-buyer retired George was given the position, with an itinerary that carried him half way round the planet once a year, to Greece, Turkey, Persia, Arabia, and India, the lands of the genii and the bottles, of arabesques, of temples and tombs, of many-colored turbans and flowing robes and distracting tongues. He walked always in a kind of mental enchantment.

The suave and elusive Oriental, with his sharp practices, found his match in this pleasant young man, who knew the history of the very wools and cottons and silks woven in a rug or carpet. So

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George prospered, became known in strange places, by strange peoples; and saw romance, light of foot and eager of eye, pass and repass; learned that romance did not essentially mean falling in love or rescuing maidens from burning houses and wrecks; that, on the contrary, true romance was kaleidoscopic, having more brilliant facets than a diamond; and that the man who begins with nothing and ends with something is more wonderful than any excursion recounted by Sinbad or any tale by Scheherazade. But he still hoped that the iridescent goddess would some day touch his shoulder and lead him into that maze of romance so peculiar to his own fancy.

And then into this little world of business and pleasure came death and death again, leaving him alone and with a twisted heart. Riches mattered little, and the sounding title of vice-president still less. It was with a distinct shock that he realized the mother and the father had been with him so long that he had forgotten to make other friends. From one thing to another he turned in hope to soothe the smart, to heal the wound; and after a time he drifted, as all shy, intelligent and imaginative men

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drift who are friendless, into the silent and intimate comradeship of inanimate things, such as jewels, ivories, old metals, rare woods and ancient embroideries, and perhaps more comforting than all these, good books.

The proper tale of how the aforesaid iridescent goddess jostled (for it scarce may be said that she led) him into a romance lacking neither comedy nor tragedy, now begins with a trifling bit of retrospection. One of those women who were not good and who looked into the clear pool of the boy's mind saw the harmless longing there, and made note, hoping to find profit by her knowledge when the pertinent day arrived. She was a woman so pleasing, so handsome, so adroit, that many a man, older and wiser than George, found her mesh too strong for him. Her plan matured, suddenly and brilliantly, as projects of men and women of her class and caliber without variation do.

Late one December afternoon (to be precise, 1909), George sat on the tea-veranda of the Hotel Semiramis in Cairo. A book lay idly upon his knees. It was one of those yarns in which something was happening every other minute. As adventures

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go, George had never had a real one in all his twenty-eight years, and he believed that fate had treated him rather shabbily. He didn't quite appreciate her reserve. No matter how late he wandered through the mysterious bazaars, either here in Egypt or over yonder in India, nothing ever befell more exciting than an argument with a carriage-driver. He never carried small-arms, for he would not have known how to use them. The only deadly things in his hands were bass-rods and tennis-racquets. No, nothing ever happened to him; yet he never met a man in a ship's smoke-room who hadn't run the gamut of thrilling experiences. As George wasn't a liar himself, he believed all he saw and most of what he heard.

Well, here he was, eight-and-twenty, a pocket full of money, a heart full of life, and as hopeless an outlook, so far as romance and adventure were concerned, as an old maid in a New England village. Why couldn't things befall him as they did the chap in this book? He was sure he could behave as well, if not better; for this fellow was too handsome, too brave, too strong, not to be something of an ass once in a while.

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"George, you old fool, what's the use?" he thought. "What's the use of a desire that never goes in a straight line, but always round and round in a circle?"

He thrust aside his grievance and surrendered to the never-ending wonder of the Egyptian sunset; the Nile feluccas, riding upon perfect reflections; the date-palms, black and motionless against the translucent blue of the sky; the amethystine prisms of the Pyramids, and the deepening gold of the desert's brim. He loved the Orient, always so new, always so strange, yet ever so old and familiar.

A carriage stopped in front, and his gaze naturally shifted. There is ceaseless attraction in speculating about new-comers in a hotel, what they are, what they do, where they come from, and where they are going. A fine elderly man of fifty got out. In the square set of his shoulders, the flowing white mustache and imperial, there was a suggestion of militarism. He was immediately followed by a young woman of twenty, certainly not over that age. George sighed wistfully. He envied those polo-players and gentleman-riders and bridge-experts who were stopping at the hotel. It wouldn't be an hour

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after dinner before some one of them found out who she was and spoke to her in that easy style which he concluded must be a gift rather than an accomplishment. You mustn't suppose for a minute that George wasn't well-born and well-bred, simply because his name was Jones. Many a Fitz-Hugh Maurice or Hugh Fitz-Maurice might have been—— But, no matter. He knew instinctively, then, what elegance was when he saw it, and this girl was elegant, in dress, in movement. He rather liked the pallor of her skin, which hinted that she wasn't one of those athletic girls who bounced in and out of the dining-room, talking loudly and smoking cigarettes and playing bridge for sixpenny points. She was tall. He was sure that her eyes were on the level with his own. The grey veil that drooped from the rim of her simple Leghorn hat to the tip of her nose obscured her eyes, so he could not know that they were large and brown and indefinably sad. They spoke not of a weariness of travel, but of a weariness of the world, more precisely, of the people who inhabited it.

She and her companion passed on into the hotel, and if George's eyes veered again toward the

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desert over which the stealthy purples of night were creeping, the impulse was mechanical; he saw nothing. In truth, he was desperately lonesome, and he knew, moreover, that he had no business to be. He was young; he could at a pinch tell a joke as well as the next man; and if he had never had what he called an adventure, he had seen many strange and wonderful things and could describe them with that mental afterglow which still lingers over the sunset of our first expressions in poetry. But there was always that hydra-headed monster, for ever getting about his feet, numbing his voice, paralyzing his hands, and never he lopped off a head that another did not instantly grow in its place. Even the sword of Perseus could not have saved him, since one has to get away from an object in order to cut it down.

Had he really ever tried to overcome this monster? Had he not waited for the propitious moment (which you and I know never comes) to throw off this species from Hades? It is all very well, when you are old and dried up, to turn to ivories and metals and precious stones; but when a fellow's young! You can't shake hands with an

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ivory replica of the Taj Mahal, nor exchange pleasantries with a Mandarin's ring, nor yet confide joys and ills into a casket of rare emeralds; indeed, they do but emphasize one's loneliness. If only he had had a dog; but one can not carry a dog half way round the world and back, at least not with comfort. What with all these new-fangled quarantine laws, duties, and fussy ships' officers who wouldn't let you keep the animal in your state-room, traveling with a four-footed friend was almost an impossibility. To be sure, women with poodles. . . . And then, there was the bitter of acid in the knowledge that no one ever came up to him and slapped him on the shoulder with a—"*Hel*-lo, Georgie, old sport; what's the good word?" for the simple fact that his shoulder was always bristling with spikes, born of the fear that some one was making fun of him.

Perchance his mother's spirit, hovering over him this evening, might have been inclined to tears. For they do say that the ghosts of the dear ones are thus employed when we are near to committing some folly, or to exploring some forgotten chamber of Pandora's box, or worse still, when that lady in-

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tends emptying the whole contents down upon our unfortunate heads. If so be, they were futile tears; Percival Algernon had accomplished its deadly purpose.

Pandora? Well, then, for the benefit of the children. She was a lady who was an intimate friend of the mythological gods. They liked her appearance so well that they one day gave her a box, casket, chest, or whatever it was, to guard. By some marvelous method, known only of gods, they had got together all the trials and tribulations of mankind (and some of the joys) and locked them up in this casket. It was the Golden Age then, as you may surmise. You recall Eve and the Apple? Well, Pandora was a forecast of Eve; she couldn't keep her eyes off the latch, and at length her hands—Fatal curiosity! Whirr! And everything has been at sixes and at sevens since that time. Pandora is eternally recurring, now here, now there; she is a blonde sometimes, and again she is a brunette; and you may take it from George and me that there is always something left in the casket.

George closed the book and consulted his sailing-list. In a short time he would leave for Port Saïd,

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thence to Naples, Christmas there, and home in January. Business had been ripping. He would be jolly glad to get home again, to renew his comradeship with his treasures. And, by Jove! there *was* one man who slapped him on the shoulder, and he was no less a person than the genial president of the firm, his father's partner, at present his own. If the old chap had had a daughter now. . . . And here one comes at last to the bottom of the sack. He had only one definite longing, a healthy human longing, the only longing worth while in all this deep, wide, round old top: to love a woman and by her be loved.

At exactly half after six the gentleman with the reversible cuffs arrived; and George missed his boat.

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CHAPTER II

AN AFFABLE ROGUE

THE carriage containing the gentleman with the reversible cuffs drew up at the side entrance. Instantly the Arab guides surged and eddied round him; but their clamor broke against a composure as effective as granite. The roar was almost directly succeeded by a low gurgle, as of little waves receding. The proposed victim had not spoken a word; to the Arabs it was not necessary; in some manner, subtle and indescribable, they recognized a brother. He carried a long, cylindrical bundle wrapped in heavy paper variously secured by windings of thick twine. His regard for this bundle was one of tender solicitude, for he tucked it under his arm, cumbersome though it was, and waved aside the carriage-porter, who was, however, permitted to carry in the kit-bag.

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The manager appeared. When comes he not upon the scene? His quick, calculating eye was not wholly assured. The stranger's homespun was travel-worn and time-worn, and of a cut popular to the season gone the year before. No fat letter of credit here, was the not unreasonable conclusion reached by the manager. Still, with that caution acquired by years of experience, which had culminated in what is known as Swiss diplomacy, he brought into being the accustomed salutatory smile and inquired if the gentleman had written ahead for reservation, otherwise it would not be possible to accommodate him.

"I telegraphed," crisply.

"The name, if you please?"

"Ryanne; spelled R-y-a double-n e. Have you ever been in County Clare?"

"No, sir." The manager added a question with the uplift of his eyebrows.

"Well," was the enlightening answer, "you pronounce it as they do there."

The manager scanned the little slip of paper in his hand. "Ah, yes; we have reserved a room for you, sir. The French style rather confused me." This was not offered in irony, or sarcasm, or satire;

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mining in a Swiss brain for the saving grace of humor is about as remunerative as the extraction of gold from sea-water. Nevertheless, the Swiss has the talent of swiftly substracting from a confusion of ideas one point of illumination: there was a quality to the stranger's tone that decided him favorably. It was the voice of a man in the habit of being obeyed; and in these days it was the power of money alone that obtained obedience to any man. Beyond this, the same nebulous cogitation that had subdued the Arabs outside acted likewise upon him. Here was a brother.

"Mail?"

"I will see, sir." The manager summoned a porter. "Room 208."

The porter caught up the somewhat collapsed kit-bag, which had in all evidence received some rough usage in its time, and reached toward the roll. Mr. Ryanne interposed.

"I will see to that, my man," tersely.

"Yes, sir."

"Where is your guest-list?" demanded Mr. Ryanne of the manager.

"The head-porter's bureau, sir. I will see if you

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have any mail." The manager passed into his own bureau. It was rather difficult to tell whether this man was an American or an Englishman. His accent was western, but his manner was decidedly British. At any rate, that tone and carriage must be bastioned by good English sovereigns, or for once his judgment was at fault.

The porter dashed up-stairs. Mr. Ryanne, his bundle still snug under his arm, sauntered over to the head-porter's bureau and ran his glance up and down the columns of visiting-cards. Once he nodded with approval, and again he smiled, having discovered that which sent a ripple across his sleeping sense of amusement. Major Callahan, room 206; Fortune Chedsoye, 205; George P. A. Jones, 210.

"Hm! the Major smells of County Antrim and the finest whisky in all the isle. Fortune Chedsoye; that is a pleasing name; tinkling brooks, the waving green grasses in the meadows, the kine in the water, the fleeting shadows under the oaks; a pastoral, a bucolic name. To claim Fortune for mine own; a happy thought."

As he uttered these poesy expressions aloud, in a voice low and not unpleasing, for all that it was

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bantering, the head-porter stared at him with mingling doubt and alarm; and as if to pronounce these emotions mutely for the benefit of the other, he permitted his eyes to open their widest.

"Tut, tut; that's all right, porter. I am cursed with the habit of speaking my inmost thoughts. Some persons are afflicted with insomnia; some fall asleep in church; I think orally. Beastly habit, eh?"

The porter then understood that he was dealing not with a species of mild lunacy, but with that kind of light-hearted cynicism upon which the world (as porters know it) had set its approving seal. In brief, he smiled faintly; and if he had any pleasantry to pass in turn, the approach of the manager, now clothed metaphorically in deferentialism, relegated it to the limbo of things thought but left unsaid.

"Here is a letter for you, Mr. Ryanne. Have you any more luggage?"

"No." Mr. Ryanne smiled. "Shall I pay for my room in advance?"

"Oh, no, sir!" Ten years ago the manager would have blushed at having been so misunderstood. "Your room is 208."

"Will you have a boy show me the way?"

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"I shall myself attend to that. If the room is not what you wish it may be exchanged."

"The room is the one I telegraphed for. I am superstitious to a degree. On three boats I have had fine state-rooms numbered 208. Twice the number of my hotel room has been the same. On the last voyage there were 208 passengers, and the captain had made 208 voyages on the Mediterranean."

"Quite a coincident."

"Ah, if roulette could be played with such a certainty."

Mr. Ryanne sighed, hitched up his bundle, which, being heavy, was beginning to wear upon his arm, and signified to the manager to lead the way.

As they vanished round the corner to the lift, the head-porter studied the guest-list. He had looked over it a dozen times that day, but this was the first instance of his being really interested in it. As his chin was freshly shaven he had no stubble to stroke to excite his mental processes; so he fell back, as we say, upon the consoling ends of his abundant mustache. Curious; but all these persons were occupying or about to occupy adjacent rooms. There was

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truly nothing mysterious about it, save that the stranger had picked out these very names as a target for his banter. Fortune Chedsoye; it was rather an unusual name; but as she had arrived only an hour or so before, he could not distinctly recall her features. Ahd then, there was that word bucolic. He mentally turned it over and over as physically he was wont to do with post-cards left in his care to mail. He could make nothing of the word, except that it smacked of the East Indian plague.

Here he was saved from further cerebral agony by a timely interruption. A man, who was not of bucolic persuasion either in dress or speech, urban from the tips of his bleached fingers to the bulb of his bibulous nose, leaned across the counter and asked if Mr. Horace Ryanne had yet arrived. Yes, he had just arrived; he was even now on his way to his room. The urban gentleman nodded. Then, with a finger slim and well-trimmed, he trailed up and down the guest-list.

"Ha! I see that you have the Duke of What-d'-ye-call from Germany here. I'll give you my card. Send it up to Mr. Ryanne. No hurry. I shall be in again after dinner."

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He bustled off toward the door. He was pursy, well-fed, and decently dressed, the sort of a man who, when he moved in any direction, created the impression that he had an important engagement somewhere else or was paring minutes from time-tables. For a man in his business it was a clever expedient, deceiving all but those who knew him. He hesitated at the door, however, as if he had changed his mind in the twenty-odd paces it took to reach it. He stared for a long period at the elderly gentleman who was watching the feluccas on the river through the window. The white mustache and imperial stood out in crisp relief against the ruddy sunburn on his face. If he was aware of this scrutiny on the part of the pursy gentleman, he gave not the least sign. The revolving door spun round, sending a puff of outdoor air into the lounging-room. The elderly gentleman then smiled, and applied his thumb and forefinger to the waxen point of his imperial.

In the intervening time Mr. Ryanne entered his room, threw the bundle on the bed, sat down beside it, and read his letter. Shadows and lights moved across his face; frowns that hardened it, smiles that

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mellowed it. Women hold the trick of writing letters. Do they hate, their thoughts flash and burn from line to line. Do they love, 'tis lettered music. Do they conspire, the breadth of their imagination is without horizon. At best, man can indite only a polite business letter, his love-notes were adjudged long since a maudlin collection of loose sentences. In this letter Mr. Ryanne found the three parts of life.

"She's a good general; but hang these brimstone efforts of hers. She talks too much of heart. For my part, I prefer to regard it as a mere physical function, a pump, a motor, a power that gives action to the legs, either in coming or in going, more especially in going." He laughed. "Well, hers is the inspiration and hers is the law. And to think that she could plan all this on the spur of the moment, down to the minutest detail! It's a science." He put the letter away, slid out his legs and glared at the dusty tips of his shoes. "The United Romance and Adventure Company, Ltd., of New York, London, and Paris. She has the greatest gift of all, the sense of humor."

He rose and opened his kit-bag doubtfully. He

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rummaged about in the depths and at last straightened up with a mild oath.

"Not a pair of cuffs in the whole outfit, not a shirt, not a collar. Oh, well, when a man has to leave Bagdad the way I did, over the back fence, so to speak, linen doesn't count."

He drew down his cuffs, detached and reversed them, he turned his folding collar wrong-side out, and used the under side of the foot-rug as a shoe-polisher. It was the ingenius procedure of a man who was used to being out late of nights, who made all things answer all purposes. This rapid and singularly careless toilet completed, he centered his concern upon the more vital matter of finances. He was close to the nadir: four sovereigns, a florin, and a collection of battered coppers that would have tickled the pulse of an amateur numismatist.

"No vintage to-night, my boy; no long, fat Havana, either. A bottle of stout and a few rags of plug-cut; that's the pace we'll travel this evening. The United Romance and Adventure Company is not listed at present. If it was, I'd sell a few shares on my own hook. The kind Lord knows that I've stock enough and to spare." He laughed again, but with-

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out the leaven of humor. "When the fool-killer snatches up the last fool, let rogues look to themselves; and fools are getting scarcer every day.

"Percival Algernon! O age of poets! I wonder, does he wear high collars and spats, or has she plumbed him accurately? She is generally right. But a man changes some in seven years. I'm an authority when it comes to that. Look what's happened to me in seven years! First, Horace, we shall dine, then we'll smoke our pipe in the billiard-room, then we'll softly approach Percival Algernon and introduce him to Sinbad. This independent excursion to Bagdad was a stroke on my part; it will work into the general plan as smoothly as if it had been grooved for the part. Sinbad. I might just as well have assumed that name: Horace Sinbad, sounds well and looks well." He mused in silence, his hand gently rubbing his chin; for he did possess the trick of talking aloud, in a low monotone, a habit acquired during periods of loneliness, when the sound of his own voice had succeeded in steadying his tottering mind.

What a woman, what a wife, she would have been to the right man! Odd thing, a man can do almost

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anything but direct his affections; they must be drawn. She was not for him; nay, not even on a desert isle. Doubtless he was a fool. In time she would have made him a rich man. Alack! It was always the one we pursued that we loved and never the one that pursued us.

"I'm afraid of her; and there you are. There isn't a man living who has gone back of that Mona Lisa smile of hers. If she was the last woman and I was the last man, I don't say." He hunted for a cigarette, but failed to find one. "Almost at the bottom, boy; the winter of our discontent, and no sun of York to make it glorious. Twenty-four hundred at cards, and to lose it like a tyro! Wallace has taught me all he knows, but I'm a booby. Twenty-four hundred, firm's money. It's a failing of mine, the firm's money. But, damn it all, I can't cheat a man at cards; I'd rather cut his throat."

He found his pipe, and a careful search of the corners of his coat-pockets revealed a meager pipeful of tobacco. He picked out the little balls of wool, the ground-coffee, the cloves, and pushed the charge home into the crusted bowl of his briar.

"To the devil with economy! A pint of burgundy

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and a perfecto if they hale us to jail for it. I'm dead tired. I've seen three corners in hell in the past two months. I'm going as far as four sovereigns will take me. . . . Fortune Chedsoye." His blue eyes became less hard and his mouth less defiant. "I repeat, the heart should be nothing but a pump. Otherwise it gets in the way, becomes an obstruction, a bottomless pit. Will-power, that's the ticket. I can face a lion without an extra beat, I can face the various countenances of death without an additional flutter; and yet, here's a girl who, when I see her or think of her, sends the pulse soaring from seventy-seven up to eighty-four. Bad business; besides, it's so infernally unfashionable. It's hard work for a man to keep his balance 'twixt the devil and the deep, blue sea; Gioconda on one side and Fortune on the other. Gioconda throws open windows and doors at my approach; but Fortune locks and bars hers, nor knocks at mine. That's the way it always goes.

"If a man could only go back ten years and take a new start. Ass!" balling his fist at the reflection in the mirror. "Snivel and whine over the bed of your own making. You had your opportunity, but you

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listened to the popping of champagne-corks, the mutter of cards, the inane drivel of chorus-ladies. You had a decent college record, too. Bah! What a guileless fool you were! You ran on, didn't you, till you found your neck in the loop at the end of the rope? And perhaps that soft-footed, estimable brother of yours didn't yank it taut as a hangman's? You heard the codicil; into one ear and out the other. Even then you had your chance; patience for two short years, and a million. No, a thousand times no. You knew what you were about, empty-headed fool! And to-day, two pennies for a dead man's eyes."

He dropped his fist dejectedly. Where had the first step begun? And where would be the last? In some drab corner, possibly; drink, morphine, or starvation; he'd never have the courage to finish it with a bullet. He was terribly bitter. Everything worth while seemed to have slipped through his fingers, his pleasure-loving fingers.

"Come, come, Horace; buck up. Still the ruby kindles in the vine. No turning back now. We'll go on till we come bang! against the wall. There may be some good bouts between here and there. I

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wonder what Gioconda would say if she knew why I was so eager for this game?"

He went down to dinner, and they gave him a table in an obscure corner, as a subtle reminder that his style was *passé*. He didn't care; he was hungry and thirsty. He could see nearly every one, even if only a few could see him. This was somewhat to his vantage. He endeavored to pick out Percival Algernon; but there were too many high collars, too many monocles. So he contented himself with a mild philosophical observance of the scene. The murmur of voices, rising as the wail of the violins sank, sinking as the wail rose; the tinkle of glass and china, the silver and linen, the pretty women in their rustling gowns, the delicate perfumes, the flash of an arm, the glint of a polished shoulder: this was the essence of life he coveted. He smiled at the thought and the sure knowledge that he was not the only wolf in the fold. Ay, and who among these dainty Red Riding Hoods might be fooled by a vulpine grandmother? Truth, when a fellow winnowed it all down to a handful, there were only fools and rogues. If one was a fool, the rogue got you, and he in turn devoured himself.

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He held his glass toward the table-lamp, moved it slowly to and fro under his nose, epicureanly; then he sipped the wine. Something like! It ran across his tongue and down his throat in tingling fire, nectarious; and he went half way to Olympus, to the feet of the gods. For weeks he had lived in the vilest haunts, in desperate straits, his life in his open hands; and now once more he had crawled from the depths to the outer crust of the world. It did not matter that he was destined to go down into the depths again; so long as the spark burned he was going to crawl back each time. Damnable luck! He could have lived like a prince. Twenty-four hundred, and all in two nights, a steady stream of gold into the pockets of men whom he could have cheated with consummate ease, and didn't. A fine wolf, whose predatory instincts were still riveted to that obsolete thing called conscience!

"Conscience? Rot! Let us for once be frank, and write it down as caution, as fear of publicity, anything but the white guardian-angel of the immortality of the soul. Heap up the gold, Apollyon; heap it up, higher and higher, till not a squeak of that still small voice that once awoke the chap in the Old

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Testament can ever again be heard. Now, no more retrospection, Horace; no more analysis; the vital question simmers down to this: If Percival Algernon balks, how far will four sovereigns go?"

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CHAPTER III

THE HOLY YHIORDES

GEORGE drank *his* burgundy perfunctorily. Had it been astringent as the native wine of Corsica, he would not have noticed it. The little nerves that ran from his tongue to his brain had temporarily lost the power of communication. And all because of the girl across the way. He couldn't keep his eyes from wandering in her direction. She faced him diagonally. She ate but little, and when the elderly gentleman poured out for her a glass of sauterne, she motioned it aside, rested her chin upon her folded hands, and stared not at but through her *vis-à-vis*.

It was a lovely head, topped with coils of lustrous, light brown hair; an oval face, of white and rose and ivory tones; scarlet lips, a small, regular nose, and a chin the soft roundness of which hid

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the resolute lift to it. To these attributes of loveliness was added a perfect form, the long, flowing curves of youth, not the abrupt contours of maturity. George couldn't recollect when he had been so impressed by a face. From the moment she had stepped down from the carriage, his interest had been drawn, and had grown to such dimensions that when he entered the dining-room his glance immediately searched for her table. What luck in finding her across the way! He questioned if he had ever seen her before. There was something familiar; the delicate profile stirred some sleeping memory but did not wake it.

How to meet her, and when he did meet her, how to interest her? If she would only drop her handkerchief, her purse, something to give him an excuse, an opening. Ah, he was certain that this time the hydra-headed one should not overcome him. To gain her attention and to hold it, he would have faced a lion, a tiger, a wild-elephant. To diagnose these symptoms might not be fair to George. "Love at first sight" reads well and sounds well, but we hoary-headed philosophers know that the phrase is only poetical license.

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Once, and only once, she looked in his direction. It swept over him with the chill of a winter wind that he meant as much to her as a tree, a fence, a meadow, as seen from the window of a speeding railway train. But this observation, transient as it was, left with him the indelible impression that her eyes were the saddest he had ever seen. Why? Why should a young and beautiful girl have eyes like that? It could not mean physical weariness, else the face would in some way have expressed it. The elderly man appeared to do his best to animate her; he was kindly and courteous, and by the gentle way he laughed at intervals was trying to bolster up the situation with a jest or two. The girl never so much as smiled, or shrugged her shoulders; she was as responsive to these overtures as marble would have been.

George's romance gathered itself for a flight. Perhaps it was love thwarted, and the gentleman with the mustache and imperial, in spite of his amiability, might be the ogre. Perhaps it was love and duty. Perhaps her lover had gone down to sea. Perhaps (for lovers are known to do such things) he had run away with the other girl. If that was

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the case, George did not think highly of that tentative gentleman's taste. Perhaps and perhaps again; but George might have gone on perhapsing till the crack o' doom, with never a solitary glimmer of the true state of the girl's mind. Whenever he saw an unknown man or woman who attracted his attention, he never could resist the impulse to invent a romance that might apply.

Immediately after dessert the two rose; and George, finding that nothing more important than a pineapple ice detained him, got up and followed. Mr. Ryanne almost trod on his heels as they went through the doorway into the cosy lounging-room. George dropped into a vacant divan and waited for his *café à la Turque*. Mr. Ryanne walked over to the head-porter's bureau and asked if that gentleman would be so kind as to point out Mr. George P. A. Jones, if he were anywhere in sight. He thoughtfully, not to say regretfully, laid down a small bribe.

"Mr. Jones?" The porter knew Mr. Jones very well. He was generous, and treated the servants as though they were really human beings. Mr. Ryanne, either by his inquiry or as the result of his bribe, went up several degrees in the porter's estima-

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tion. "Mr. Jones is over there, on the divan by the door."

"Thanks."

But Ryanne did not then seek the young man. He studied the quarry from a diplomatic distance. No; there was nothing to indicate that George Percival Algernon Jones was in any way handicapped by his Arthuresque middle names.

"No fool, as Gioconda in her infinite wisdom hath said; but romantic, terribly romantic, yet, like the timid bather who puts a foot into the water, finds it cold, and withdraws it. It will all depend upon whether he is a real collector or merely a buyer of rugs. Forward, then, Horace; a sovereign has already dashed headlong down the far horizon." The curse of speaking his thoughts aloud did not lie heavily upon him to-night, for these cogitations were made in silence, unmarked by any facial expression. He proceeded across the room and sat down beside George. "I beg your pardon," he began, "but are you not Mr. Jones?"

Mildly astonished, George signified that he was.

"George P. A. Jones?"

George nodded again, but with some heat in his

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cheeks. "Yes. What is it?" The girl had just finished her coffee and was going away. Hang this fellow! What did he want at this moment?

If Ryanne saw that he was too much, as the French say, he also perceived the cause. The desire to shake George till his teeth rattled was instantly overcome. She hadn't seen him, and for this he was grateful. "You are interested in rugs? I mean old ones, rare ones, rugs that are bought once and seldom if ever sold again."

"Why, yes. That's my business." George had no silly ideas about trade. He had never posed as a gentleman's son in the sense that it meant idleness.

Ryanne presented his card.

"How do you pronounce it?" asked George naïvely.

"As they do in Cork."

"I never saw it spelled that way before."

"Nothing surprising in that," replied Ryanne. "No one else has, either."

George laughed and waited for the explanation.

"You see, Ryan is as good a name as they make them; but it classes with prize-fighters, politicians, and bar chemists. The two extra letters put the

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finishing touch to the name. A jewel is all right, but what tells is the way you hang it round your neck. To me, those additional letters represent the jewel Ryan in the hands of a Lalique."

"You talk like an American."

"I am; three generations. What's the matter?" with sudden concern.

George was frowning. "Haven't I met you somewhere before?"

"Not to my recollection." A speculative frown now marred Ryanne's forehead. It did not illustrate a search in his memory for such a casualty as the meeting of George. He never forgot a face and certainly did not remember George's. Rather, the frown had its source in the mild dread that Percival Algernon had seen him somewhere during one of those indispositions of the morning after. "No; I think you have made a mistake."

"Likely enough. It just struck me that you looked something like a chap named Wadsworth, who was half-back on the varsity, when I entered my freshman year."

"A university man? Lord, no! I was turned loose at ten; been hustling ever since." Ryanne

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spoke easily, not a tremor in his voice, although he had received a slight mental jolt. "No; no college record here. But I want to chat with you about rugs. I've heard of you, indirectly."

"From the carpet fellows? We do a big business over here. What have you got?"

"Well, I've a rug up in my room I'd like to show you. I want your judgment for one thing. Will you do me the favor?"

Since the girl had disappeared and with her those imaginary appurtenances that had for a space transformed the lounging-room into a stage, George saw again with normal vision that the room was simply a common meeting-ground for well-dressed persons and ill-dressed persons, of the unimpeachable, the impeccable, the doubtful and the peccant; for in Cairo, as in ancient Egypt, there is every class and kind of humans, for whom the Decalogue was written, transcribed, and shattered by the turbulent Moses, an incident more or less forgotten these days. From the tail of his eye he gave swift scrutiny to this chance acquaintance, and he found nothing to warrant suspicion. It was not an unusual procedure for men to hunt him up in Cairo, in Constantinople, in Smyrna,

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or in any of the Oriental cities where his business itinerary led him. The house of Mortimer & Jones was widely known. This man Ryanne might have been anywhere between thirty and forty. He was tall, well set up, blond and smooth-skinned. True, he appeared to have been ill-fed recently. A little more flesh under the cheek-bones, a touch of color, and the Irishman would have been a handsome man. George could read a rug a league off, as they say, but he was a child in the matter of physiognomy, whereas Ryanne was a past-master in this regard; it was necessary both for his business and safety.

"Certainly, I'll take a look at it. But I tell you frankly," went on George, "that to interest me it's got to be a very old one. You see, it's a little fad of mine, outside the business end of it. I'm crazy over real rugs, and I know something about every rare one in existence, or known to exist. Is it a copy?"

"No. I'll tell you more about it when we get to my room."

"Come on, then." George was now quite willing to discuss rugs and carpets.

Having gained the room, Ryanne threw off his

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coat and relighted his cigar, which, in a saving mood, he had allowed to go out. He motioned George to be seated.

"Just a little yarn before I show you the rug. See these cuffs?"

"Yes."

"You will observe that I have had to reverse them. Note this collar? Same thing. Trousers-hems a bit frayed, coat shiny at the elbows." Ryanne exhibited his sole fortune. "Four sovereigns between me and a jail."

George became thoughtful. He was generous and kind-hearted among those he knew intimately or slightly, but he had the instinctive reserve of the seasoned traveler in cases like this. He waited.

"The truth is, I'm all but done for. And if I fail to strike a bargain here with you. . . . Well, I should hate to tell you the result. Our consul would have to furnish me passage home. Were you ever up against it to the extent of reversing your cuffs and turning your collars? You don't know what life is, then."

George gravely produced two good cigars and offered one to his host. There was an absence of

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sound, broken presently by the cheerful crackle of matches; two billowing clouds of smoke floated outward and upward. Ryanne sighed. Here was a cigar one could not purchase in all the length and breadth of the Orient, a Pedro Murias. In one of his doubtfully prosperous epochs he had smoked them daily. How long ago had that been?

"Yonder is a rug, a prayer-rug, as holy to the Moslem as the idol's eye is to the Hindu, as the Bible is to the Christian. For hundreds of years it never saw the outside of the Sultan's palace. One day the late, the recently late, Abdul the Unspeakable Turk, gave it to the Pasha of Bagdad. Whenever this rug makes its appearance in Holy Mecca, it is worshiped, and none but a Sultan or a Sultan's favorite may kneel upon it. Bagdad, the hundred mosques, the old capital of Suleiman the Great, the dreary Tigris and the sluggish Euphrates, a muezzin from the turret calls to prayer, and all that; eh?"

George leaned forward from his chair, a gentle terror in his heart. "The Yhiordes? By Jove! is that the Yhiordes?"

Admiration kindled in Ryanne's eyes. To have hit the bull's-eye with so free and quick an aim was

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ample proof that Percival Algernon had not boasted when he said that he knew something about rugs.

"You've guessed it."

"How did you come by it?" George demanded excitedly.

"Why do you ask that?"

"Man, ten-thousand pounds could not purchase that rug, that bit of carpet. Collectors from every port have been after it in vain. And you mean to tell me that it lies there, wrapped in butcher's paper?"

"Right-O!"

Ryanne solemnly detached a cuff and rolled up his sleeve. The bare muscular arm was scarred by two long, ugly knife-wounds, scarcely healed. Next he drew up a trousers-leg, disclosing a battered shin. "And there's another on my shoulder-blade, the closest call I ever had. A man who takes his life in his hands, as I have done, merits some reward. Mr. Jones, I'll be frank with you. I am a kind of derelict. Since I was a boy, I have hated the humdrum of offices, of shops. I wanted to be my own man, to go and come as I pleased. To do this and live meant precarious exploits. This rug represents

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one of them. I am telling you the family secret; I am showing you the skeleton in the closet, confidentially. I stole that rug; and when I say that the seven labors of our old friend Hercules were simple diversions compared, you'll recognize the difficulties I had to overcome. You know something of the Oriental mind. I handled the job alone. I may not be out of the jungle yet."

George listened entranced. He could readily construct the scenes through which this adventurer had gone: the watchful nights, the untiring patience, the thirst, the hunger, the heat. And yet, he could hardly believe. He was a trifle skeptical. Many a rogue had made the mistake of playing George's age against his experience. He had made some serious blunders in the early stages of the business, however; and everybody, to gain something in the end, must lose something at the start.

"If that rug is the one I have in mind, you certainly have stolen it. And if it's a copy, I'll tell you quickly enough."

"That's fair. And that's why," Ryanne declared, "I wanted you to look at it. To me, considering what I have gone through to get it, to me it is the

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genuine carpet. To your expert eye it may be only a fine copy. I know this much, that rare rugs and paintings have many copies, and that some one is being hooked, sold, bamboozled, sandbagged, every day in the week. If this is the real article, I want you to take it off my hands," the adventurer finished pleasantly.

"There will be a hue and cry."

"No doubt of it."

"And the devil's own job to get it out of Egypt." These were set phrases of the expert, preliminaries to bargaining. "One might as well carry round a stolen elephant."

"But a man who is as familiar with the game as you are would have little difficulty. Your integrity is an established fact, on both sides of the water. You could take it to New York as a copy, and no appraiser would know the difference. It's worth the attempt. I'd take it to New York myself, but you see, I am flat broke. Come; what do you or I care about a son-of-a-gun of a Turk?" drolly.

"What do you want for it, supposing it's genuine?" George's throat was dry and his voice harsh. His conscience roused herself, feebly, for it had been

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a long time since occasion had necessitated her presence.

Ryanne narrowed his eyes, carefully balancing the possibilities. "Say, one thousand pounds. It is like giving it away. But when the devil drives, you know. It is beyond any set price; it is worth what any collector is willing to pay for it. I believe I know the kind of man you are, Mr. Jones, and that is why, when I learned you were in Cairo, I came directly to you. You would never sell this rug. No. You would become like a miser over his gold. You would keep it with your emeralds (I have heard about them, too); draw the curtains, lock the doors, whenever you looked at it. Eh? You would love it for its own sake, and not because it is worth so many thousand pounds. You are sailing in a few days; that will help. The Pasha is in Constantinople, and it will be three or four weeks before he hears of the theft, or the cost," with a certain grimness.

"You haven't killed any one?" whispered George.

"I don't know; perhaps. Christianity against paganism; the Occidental conscience permits it." Ryanne made a gesture to indicate that he would

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submit to whatever moral arraignment Mr. Jones deemed advisable to make.

But George made none. He rose hastily, sought his knife and, without so much as by your leave, slashed the twine, flung aside the paper, and threw the rug across the counterpane. It was the Yhiordes. There was not the slightest doubt in his mind. He had heard it described, he had seen a photograph of it, he knew its history and, most vital of all, he owned a good copy of it.

Against temptation that was robust and energetic and alluring (like the man who insists upon your having a drink when you want it and ought not to have it), what chance had conscience, grown innocuous in the long period of the young man's good behavior? Collectors are always honest before and after that moment arrives when they want something desperately; and George was no more saintly than his kind. And how deep Ryanne and his confederates had delved into human nature, how well they could read and judge it, was made manifest in this moment of George's moral relapse.

Bagdad, the jinns, Sinbad, the Thousand and One Nights, Alibaba and the Forty Thieves: George was

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transported mentally to that magic city, standing between the Tigris and the Euphrates, in all its white glory of a thousand years gone. Ryanne, the room and its furnishings, all had vanished, all save the exquisite fabric patterned out of wool and cotton and knotted with that mingling love and skill and patience the world knows no more. He let his hand stray over it. How many knees had pressed its thick yet pliant substance? How many strange scenes had it mutely witnessed, scenes of beauty, of terror? It shone under the light like the hide of a healthy hound.

The nerves of a smoker are generally made apparent by the rapidity of his exhalations. These two, in the several minutes, had filled the room with a thick, blue haze; and through this the elder man eyed the younger. The sign of the wolf gleamed in his eyes, but without animosity, modified as it was by the half-friendly, half-cynical smile.

"I'll risk it," said George finally, having stepped off the magical carpet, as it were. "I can't give you a thousand pounds to-night. I can give you three hundred, and the balance to-morrow, between ten and eleven, at Cook's."

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"That will be agreeable to me."

George passed over all the available cash he had, rolled up the treasure and tucked it under his arm. That somewhere in the world was a true believer, wailing and beating his breast and calling down from Allah curses upon the giaour, the dog of an infidel, who had done this thing, disturbed George not in the least.

"I say," as he opened the door, "you must tell me all about the adventure. It must have been a thriller."

"It was," replied Ryanne. "The story will keep. Later, if you care to hear it."

"Of course," added George, moved by a discretionary thought, "this transaction is just between you and me."

"You may lay odds on that," heartily. "Well, good night. See you at Cook's in the morning."

"Good night." George passed down the corridor to the adjoining room.

And now, bang! goes Pandora's box.

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CHAPTER IV

AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE

THAT faculty which decides on the lawlessness of our actions: so the noted etymologist described conscience. It fell to another distinguished intellect to add that conscience makes cowards of us all. Ay. She may be overcome at times, sidetracked for any special desire that demands a clear way; but she's after us, fast enough, with that battered red lantern of hers, which, brought down from all tongues crisply into our own, reads—"Don't do it!" She herself is not wholly without cunning. She rarely stands boldly upon the track to flag us as we come. She realizes that she might be permanently ditched. No; it is far safer to run after us and catch us. A digression, perhaps, but more pertinently an application.

Temptation then no longer at his shoulder,

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George began to have qualms, little chaps, who started buzzing into his moral ears with all that maddening, interminable drone which makes one marvel however do school-teachers survive their first terms. Among these qualms there was none that pleaded for the desolate Turk or his minions whose carelessness had made the theft possible. For all George cared, the Moslem might grind his forehead in the soulless sand and make the air palpitate with his plaints to Allah. No. The disturbance was due to the fact that never before had he been wittingly the purchaser of stolen goods. He never tried to gloze over the subtle distinction between knowing and suspecting; and if he had been variously suspicious in regard to certain past bargains, conscience had found no sizeable wedge for her demurrers. The Yhiordes was confessedly stolen.

He paused, with his hand upon the door-knob of his room. If he didn't keep the rug, it would fall into the hands of a collector less scrupulous. To return it to the Pasha at Bagdad would be pure folly, and thankless. It was one of the most beautiful weavings in existence. It was as priceless in its way as any Raphael in the Vatican. And he desired

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its possession intensely. Why not? Insidious phrase! Was it not better that the world should see and learn what a wonderful craft the making of a rare rug had been, than to allow it to return to the sordid chamber of a harem, to inevitable ruin? As Ryanne said, what the deuce was a fanatical Turk or Arab to him?

Against these specious arguments in favor of becoming the adventurer's abettor and accomplice, there was first the possible stain of blood. The man agreed that he had come away from Bagdad in doubt. George did not like the thought of blood. Still, he had collected a hundred emeralds, not one of which was without its red record. Again, if he carried the rug home with his other purchases, he could pull it through the customs only by lying, which was as distasteful to his mind as being a receiver of stolen goods.

He had already paid a goodly sum against the purchase; and it was not likely that a man who was down to reversing his collars and cuffs would take back the rug and refund the money. The Yhiordes was his, happen what might. So conscience snuffed out her red lantern and retired.

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Some light steps, a rustle, and he wheeled in time to see a woman open a door, stand for a minute in the full light, and disappear. It was she. George opened the door of his own room, threw the rug inside, and tiptoed along the corridor, stopping for the briefest time to ascertain the number of that room. He felt vastly more guilty in performing this harmless act than in smothering his mentor.

There was no one in the head-porter's bureau; thus, unobserved and unembarrassed, he was free to inspect the guest-list. Fortune Chedsoye. He had never seen a name quite like that. Its quaintness did not suggest to him, as it had done to Ryanne, the pastoral, the bucolic. Rather it reminded him of the old French courts, of rapiers and buckles, of powdered wigs and furbelows, masks, astrologers, love-intrigues, of all those colorful, mutable scenes so charmingly described by the genial narrator of the exploits of D'Artagnan. And abruptly out of this age of Lebrun, Watteau, Molière, reached an ice-cold hand. If that elderly codger wasn't her father, who was he and what?

The Major—for George had looked him up also—

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was in excellent trim for his age, something of a military dandy besides; but as the husband of so young and exquisite a creature! Out upon the thought! He might be her guardian, or, at most, her uncle, but never her husband. Yet (O poisonous doubt!), at the table she had ignored the Major, both his jests and his attentions. He had seen many wives, joyfully from a safe distance, act toward their husbands in this fashion. Oh, rot! If his name was Callahan and hers Chedsoye, they could not possibly be tied in any legal bonds. He dismissed the ice-cold hand and turned again to the comforting warmth of his ardor.

He had never spoken to young women without presentation, and on these rare occasions he had broached the weather, suggested the possibilities of the weather, and concluded with an apostrophe on the weather at large. It was usually a valedictory. For he was always positive that he had acted like a fool, and was afraid to speak to the girl again. Never it failed, ten minutes after the girl was out of sight, the brightest and cleverest things crowded upon his tongue, to be but wasted on the desert air. He was not particularly afraid of women older

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than himself, more's the pity. And yet, had he been as shy toward them as toward the girls, there would have been no stolen Yhiordes, no sad-eyed maiden, no such thing as The United Romance and Adventure Company, Ltd.; and he would have stepped the even tenor of his way, unknown of grand passions, swift adventure, life.

George was determined to meet Fortune Chedsoye, and this determination, the first of its kind to take definite form in his mind, gave him a novel sensation. He would find some way, and he vowed to best his old enemy, diffidence, if it was the last fight he ever put up. He would manœuver to get in the way of the Major. He never found much trouble in talking to men. Once he exchanged a word or two with the uncle or guardian, he would make it a point to renew the acquaintance when he saw the two together. It appeared to him as a bright idea, and he was rather proud of it. Even now he was conscious of clenching his teeth strongly. It's an old saying that he goes farthest who shuts his teeth longest. He was going to test the precept by immediate practice.

He had stood before the list fully three minutes.

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Now he turned about face, a singular elation tingling his blood. Once he set his mind upon a thing, he went forward. He had lost many pleasurable things in life because he had doubted and faltered, not because he had reached out toward them and had then drawn back. He was going to meet Fortune Chedsoye; when or how were but details. And as he discovered the Major himself idling before the booth of the East Indian merchant, he saw in fancy the portcullis rise and the drawbridge fall to the castle of enchantment. He strolled over leisurely and pretended to be interested in the case containing mediocre jewels.

"This is a genuine Bokhara embroidery?" the Major was inquiring.

"Oh, yes, sir."

"How old?"

The merchant picked up the tag and squinted at it. "It is between two and three hundred years old, sir."

To George's opinion the gods themselves could not have arranged a more propitious moment.

"You've made a mistake," he interposed quietly. "That is Bokhara, but the stitch is purely modern."

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The dark eyes of the Indian flashed. "The gentleman is an authority?" sarcastically.

"Upon that style of embroidery, absolutely." George smiled. And then, without more ado, he went on to explain the difference between the antique and the modern. "You have one good piece of old Bokhara, but it isn't rare. Twenty-pounds would be a good price for it."

The Major laughed heartily. "And just this moment he asked a hundred for it. I'm not much of a hand in judging these things. I admire them, but have no intimate knowledge regarding their worth. Nothing to-night," he added to the bitter-eyed merchant. "The Oriental is like the amateur fisherman: truth is not in him. You seem to be a keen judge," as they moved away from the booth.

"I suppose it's because I'm inordinately fond of the things. I've really a good collection of Bokhara embroideries at home in New York."

"You live in New York?" with mild interest. The Major sat down and graciously motioned for George to do the same. "I used to live there; twenty-odd years ago. But European travel spoils America; the rush there, the hurry, the clamor. Over here

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they dine, there they eat. There's as much difference between those two performances as there is between *The Mikado* and *Florodora*. From Portland in Maine to Portland in Oregon, the same dress, same shops, same ungodly high buildings. Here it is different, at the end of every hundred miles."

George agreed conditionally. (The Major wasn't very original in his views.) He would have shed his last drop of blood for his native land, but he was honest in acknowledging her faults.

Conversation idled in various channels, and finally became anchored at jewels. Here the Major was at home, and he loved emeralds above all other stones. He proved to be an engaging old fellow, had circled the globe three or four times, and had had an adventure or two worth recounting. And when he incidentally mentioned his niece, George wanted to shake his hand.

Would Mr. Jones join him with a peg to sleep on? Mr. Jones certainly would. And after a mutual health, George diplomatically excused himself, retired, buoyant and happy. How simple the affair had been! A fellow could do anything if only he set his mind to it. To-morrow he would meet

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Fortune Chedsoye, and may Beelzebub shrive him if he could not manage to control his recalcitrant tongue.

As he passed out of sight, Major Callahan smiled. It was that old familiar smile which, charged with gentle mockery, we send after departing fools. It was plain that he needed another peg to keep company with the first, for he rose and gracefully wended his way down-stairs to the bar. Two men were already leaning against the friendly, inviting mahogany. There was a magnum of champagne standing between their glasses. The Major ordered a temperate whisky and soda, drank it, frowned at the magnum, paid the reckoning, and went back up-stairs again.

"Don't remember old friends, eh?" said the shorter of the two men, caressing his incarnadined proboscis. "A smile wouldn't have hurt him any, do you think?"

"Shut up!" admonished Ryanne. "You know the orders; no recognition on the public floors."

"Why, I meant no harm," the other protested. He took a swallow of wine. "But, dash it! here I am, more'n four thousand miles from old Broad-

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way, and still walking blind. When is the show to start?"

"Not so loud, old boy. You've got to have patience. You've had some good pickings for the past three months, in the smoke-rooms. That ought to soothe you."

"Well, it doesn't. Here I come from New York, three months ago, with a wad of money for you and a great game in sight. It takes a week to find you, and when I do . . . Well, you know. No sooner are you awake, than what? Off you go to Bagdad, on the wildest goose-chase a man ever heard of. And that leaves me with nothing to do and nobody to talk to. I could have cried yesterday when I got your letter saying you'd be in to-day."

"Well, I got it."

"The rug?"

"Yes. It was wild; but after what I'd been through I needed something wild to steady my nerves; some big danger, where I'd simply have to get together."

"And you got it?" There was frank wonder and admiration in the pursy gentleman's eyes. "All alone, and you got it? Honest?"

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"Honest. They nearly had my hide, though."

"Where is it?"

"Sold."

"Who?"

"Percival."

"Horace, you're a wonder, if there ever was one. Sold it to Percival! You couldn't beat that in a thousand years. You're a great man."

"Praise from Sir Hubert."

"Who's he?"

"An authority on several matters."

"How much did he give you for it?"

"Tut, tut! It was all my own little jaunt, Wallace. I should hate to lie to you about it."

"What about the stake I gave you?"

Ryanne made a sign of dealing cards.

"Threw it away on a lot of dubs, after all I've taught you!"

"Cards aren't my *forte*."

"There's a yellow streak in your hide, somewhere, Horace."

"There is, but it is the tiger's stripe, my friend. What I did with my money is my own business."

"Will she allow for that?"

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"Would it matter one way or the other?"

"No, I don't suppose it would. Sometimes I think you're with us as a huge joke. You don't take the game serious enough." Wallace emptied his glass and tipped the bottle carefully. "You're out of your class, somehow."

"So?"

"Yes. You have always struck me as a man who was hunting trouble for one end."

"And that?" Ryanne seemed interested.

Wallace drew his finger across his throat. Ryanne looked him squarely in the eye and nodded affirmatively.

"I don't understand at all."

"You never will, Wallace, old chap. I am the prodigal son whose brother ate the fatted calf before I returned home. I had a letter to-day. She will be here to-morrow sometime. You may have to go to Port Saïd, if my little plan doesn't mature."

"The *Ludwig?*"

"Yes."

"Say, what a *Frau* she would have made the right man!"

Ryanne did not answer, but glowered at his glass.

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"The United Romance and Adventure Company." Wallace twirled his glass. "If you're a wonder, she's a marvel. A Napoleon in petticoats! It does make a fellow grin, when you look it all over. But this is going to be her Austerlitz or her Waterloo. And you really got that rug; and on top of that, you have sold it to George P. A. Jones! Here's——"

"Many happy returns," ironically.

They finished the bottle without further talk. There was no conviviality here. Both were fond of good wine, but the more they drank, the tighter grew their lips. Men who have been in the habit of guarding dangerous secrets become taciturn in their cups.

From time to time, flittingly, there appeared against one of the windows, just above the half-curtain, a lean, dark face which, in profile, resembled the kite—the hooked beak, the watchful, preyful eyes. There were two hungers written upon that Arab face, food and revenge.

"Allah is good," he murmured.

He had but one eye in use, the other was bandaged. In fact, the face exhibited general in-

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dications of rough warfare, the skin broken on the bridge of the nose, a freshly healed cut under the seeing eye, a long strip of plaster extending from the ear to the mouth. There was nothing of the beggar in his mien. His lean throat was erect, his chin protrusive, the set of his shoulders proud and defiant. Ordinarily, the few lingering guides would rudely have told him to be off about his business; but they were familiar with all turbans, and in the peculiar twist of this one, soiled and ragged though it was, they recognized some prince from the eastern deserts. Presently he strode away, but with a stiffness which they knew came from long journeys upon racing-camels.

George dreamed that night of magic carpets, of sad-eyed maidens, of fierce Bedouins, of battles in the desert, of genii swelling terrifically out of squat bottles. And once he rose and turned on the lights to assure himself that the old Yhiordes was not a part of these vivid dreams.

He was up shortly after dawn, in white riding-togs, for a final canter to Mena House and return. In two days more he would be leaving Egypt behind. Rather glad in one sense, rather sorry in

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another. Where to put the rug was a problem. He might carry it in his steamer-roll; it would be handier there than in the bottom of his trunk, stored away in the ship's hold. Besides, his experience had taught him that steamer-rolls were only indifferently inspected. You will observe that the luster of his high ideals was already dimming. He reasoned that insomuch as he was bound to smuggle and lie, it might be well to plan something artistically. He wished now that he was going to spend Christmas in Cairo; but it was too late to change his booking without serious loss of time and money.

He had a light breakfast on the veranda of the Mena House, climbed up to the desert, bantered the donkey-boys, amused himself by watching the descent of some German tourists who had climbed the big Pyramid before dawn to witness the sunrise, and threw pennies to the horde of blind beggars who instantly swarmed about him and demanded, in the name of Allah, a competence for the rest of their days. He finally escaped them by footing it down the incline to the hotel gardens, where his horse stood waiting.

It was long after nine when he slid from the

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saddle at the side entrance of the Semiramis. He was on his way to the bureau for his key, when an exquisitely gloved hand lightly touched his arm.

"Don't you remember me, Mr. Jones?" said a voice of vocal honey.

George did. In his confusion he dropped his pith-helmet, and in stooping to pick it up, bumped into the porter who had rushed to his aid. Remember her! Would he ever forget her? He never thought of her without dubbing himself an outrageous ass. He straightened, his cheeks afire; blushing was another of those uncontrollable asininities of his. It was really she, come out of a past he had hoped to be eternally inresuscitant; the droll, the witty woman, to whom in one mad moment of liberality and Galahadism he had loaned without security one hundred and fifty pounds at the roulette tables in Monte Carlo; she, for whom he had always blushed when he recalled how easily she had mulcted him! And here she was, serene, lovely as ever, unchanged.

"My dear," said the stranger (George couldn't recall by what name he had known her); "my dear," to Fortune Chedsoye, who stood a little behind her,

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"this is the gentleman I've often told you about. You were at school at the time. I borrowed a hundred and fifty pounds of him at Monte Carlo. And what do you think? When I went to pay him back the next day, he was gone, without leaving the slightest clue to his whereabouts. Isn't that droll? And to think that I should meet him here!"

That her name had slipped his memory, if indeed he had ever known it, was true; but one thing lingered incandescently in his mind, and that was, he *had* written her, following minutely her own specific directions and inclosing his banker's address in Paris, Naples, and Cairo; and for many passings of moons he had opened his foreign mail eagerly and hopefully. But hope must have something to feed upon, and after a struggle lasting two years, she rendered up the ghost. . . . It wasn't the loss of money that hurt; it was the finding of dross metal where he supposed there was naught but gold. Perhaps his later shyness was due as much to this disillusioning incident as to his middle names.

"Isn't it droll, my dear?" the enchantress repeated; and George grew redder and redder under

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the beautiful, grateful eyes. "I must give him a draft this very morning."

"But . . . Why, my dear Madame," stammered George. "You must not . . . I . . .!"

Fortune laughed. Somehow the quality of that laughter pierced George's confused brain as sometimes a shaft of sunlight rips into a fog, suddenly, stiletto-like. It was full of malice.

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CHAPTER V

THE GIRL WHO WASN'T WANTED

IF ANY one wronged George, defrauded him of money or credit, he was always ready to forgive, agreeing that perhaps half the fault had been his. This was not a sign of weakness, but of a sense of justice too well leavened with mercy. Humanity errs in the one as much as in the other, doubtless with some benign purpose in perspective. Now, it might be that this charming woman had really never received his letter; such things have been known to go astray. In any case he could not say that he had written. That would have cast a doubt upon her word, an unpardonable rudeness. So, for her very beauty alone, he gave her the full benefit of the doubt.

"You mustn't let the matter trouble you in the

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least," he said, his helmet now nicely adjusted under his arm. "It was so long ago I had really forgotten all about it." Which was very well said for George.

"But I haven't. I have often wondered what you must have thought of me. Monte Carlo is such a place! But I must present my daughter. I am Mrs. Chedsoye."

"I am glad to meet you, Mr. Jones;" and in the sad eyes there was a glimmer of real friendliness. More, she extended her hand.

It was well worth while, that hundred and fifty pounds. It was well worth the pinch here and the pinch there which had succeeded that loan. For he had determined to return to America with a pound or two on his letter of credit, and the success of this determination was based upon many a sacrifice in comfort, sacrifices he had never confided to his parents. It was not in the nature of things to confess that the first woman he had met in his wanderings should have been the last. As he took the girl's hand, with the ulterior intent of holding it till death do us part, he wondered why she had laughed like that. The echo of it still

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rang in his ears. And while he could not have described it, he knew instinctively that it had been born of bitter thought.

They chatted for a quarter of an hour or more, and managed famously. It seemed to him that Fortune Chedsoye was the first young woman he had ever met who could pull away sudden barriers and open up pathways for speech, who, when he was about to flounder into some *cul-de-sac,* guided him adroitly into an alley round it. Not once was it necessary to drag in the weather, that perennial if threadbare topic. He was truly astonished at the ease with which he sustained his part in the conversation, and began to think pretty well of himself. It did not occur to him that when two clever and attractive women set forth to make a man talk (always excepting he is dumb), they never fail to succeed. To do this they contrive to bring the conversation within the small circle of his work, his travels, his preferences, his ambitions. To be sure, all this is not fully extracted in fifteen minutes, but a woman obtains in that time a good idea of the ground plan.

Two distinct purposes controlled the women in

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this instance. One desired to interest him, while the other sought to learn whether he was stupid or only shy.

At last, when he left them to change his clothes and hurry down to Cook's, to complete the bargain for the Yhiordes, he had advanced so amazingly well that they had accepted his invitation to the polo-match that afternoon. He felt that invisible Mercurial wings had sprouted from his heels, for in running up the stairs, he was aware of no gravitative resistance. That this anomaly (an acquaintance with two women about whom he knew nothing) might be looked upon askance by those who conformed to the laws and by-laws of social usages, worried him not in the least. On the contrary, he was thinking that he would be the envy of every other man out at the Club that afternoon.

"Well?" said Mrs. Chedsoye, a quizzical smile slanting her lips.

"You wish my opinion?" countered the daughter. "He is shy, but he is neither stupid nor silly; and when he smiles he is really good-looking."

"My child," replied the woman, drawing off her gloves and examining her shapely hands, "I have

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looked into the very heart of that young man. A thousand years ago, a red-cross on his surtout, he would have been beating his fists against the walls of Jerusalem; five hundred years later, he would have been singing *chant-royales* under lattice-windows; a paladin and a poet."

"How do you know that? Did he make love to you?"

"No; but I made love to him without his knowing it; and that was more to my purpose than having him make love to me," enigmatically. "Three days, and he was so guileless that he never asked my name. But in Monte Carlo, as you know, one asks only your banker's name."

"And your purpose?"

"It is still mine, dear. Do you realize that we haven't seen each other in four months, and that you haven't offered to kiss me?"

"Did he go away without writing to you about that money?"

Mrs. Chedsoye calmly plucked out the inturned fingers of her gloves. "I believe I did receive a note inclosing his banker's address, but, unfortunately, in the confusion of returning to Paris, I lost

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it. My memory has always been a trial to me," sadly.

"Since when?" coldly. "There is not a woman living with a keener memory than yours."

"You flatter me. In affairs that interest me, perhaps."

"You never meant to pay him. It is horrible."

"My dear Fortune, how you jump at conclusions! Did I not offer him a draft the very first thing?"

"Knowing that at such a moment he could not possibly accept it?" derisively. "Sometimes I hate you!"

"In these days filial devotion is a lost art."

"No, no; it is a flower parents have ceased to cultivate."

And there was in the tone a strained note which described an intense longing to be loved. For if George Percival Algernon Jones was a lonely young man, it was the result of his own blindness; whereas Fortune Chedsoye turned hither and thither in search of that which she never could find. The wide Lybian desert held upon its face a loneliness, a desolation, less mournful than that which reigned within her heart.

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"Hush! We are growing sentimental," warned the mother. "Besides, I believe we are attracting attention." Her glance swept a half-circle complacently.

"Pardon me! I should be sorry to draw attention to you, knowing how you abhor it."

"My child, learn from me; temper is the arch-enemy of smooth complexions. Jones—it makes you laugh."

"It is a homely, honest name."

"I grant that. But a Percival Algernon Jones!" Mrs. Chedsoye laughed softly. It was one of those pleasant sounds that caused persons within hearing to wait for it to occur again. "Come; let us go up to the room. It is a dull, dusty journey in from Port Saïd."

Alone, Fortune was certain that for her mother her heart knew nothing but hate. Neglect, indifference, injustice, misunderstanding, the chill repellence that always met the least outreaching of the child's affections, the unaccountable disappearances, the terror of the unknown, the blank wall of ignorance behind which she was always kept, upon these hate had builded her dark and brooding retreat.

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Yet, never did the mother come within the radius of her sight that she did not fall under the spell of strange fascination, enchaining, fight against it how she might. A kindly touch of the hand, a single mother-smile, and she would have flung her arms about the other woman's neck.

But the touch and the mother-smile never came. She knew, she understood: she wasn't wanted, she hadn't been wanted in the beginning; to her mother she was as the young of animals, interesting only up to that time when they could stand alone. That the mother never made and held feminine friendships was in nowise astonishing. Beauty and charm, such as she possessed, served immediately to stimulate envy in other women's hearts. And that men of all stations in life flocked about her, why, it is the eternal tribute demanded of beauty. Here and there the men were not all the daughter might have wished. Often they burnt sweet flattery at her shrine, tentatively; but as she coolly stamped out these incipient fires, they at length came to regard her as one regards the beauty of a frosted window, as a thing to admire and praise in passing. One ache always abided: the bitter knowledge that had

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she met in kind smile for smile and jest for jest, she might have been her mother's boon companion. But deep back in some hidden chamber of her heart lay a secret dread of such a step, a dread which, whenever she strove to analyze it, ran from under her investigating touch, as little balls of quicksilver run from under the pressure of a thumb.

She was never without the comforts of life, well-fed, well-dressed, well-housed, and often her mother flung her some jeweled trinket which (again that sense of menace) she put away, but never wore. The bright periods were when they left her in the little villa near Mentone, with no one but her old and faithful nurse. There, with her horse, her books and her flowers, she was at peace. Week into week and month into month she was let be. Never a letter came, save from some former schoolmate who was coming over and wanted letters of introduction to dukes and duchesses. If she smiled over these letters it was with melancholy; for the dukes and duchesses, who fell within her singular orbit, were not the sort to whom one gave letters of introduction.

Where her mother went she never had the

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least idea. She might be in any of the great ports of the world, anywhere between New York and Port Saïd. The Major generally disappeared at the same time. Then, perhaps, she'd come back from a pleasant tram-ride over to Nice and find them both at the villa, maid and luggage. Mayhap a night or two, and off they'd go again; never a word about their former journey, uncommunicative, rather quiet. These absences, together with the undemonstrative reappearances, used to hurt Fortune dreadfully. It gave her a clear proof of where she stood, exactly nowhere. The hurt had lessened with the years, and now she didn't care much. Like as not, they would drag her out of Eden for a month or two, for what true reason she never could quite fathom, unless it was that at times her mother liked to have the daughter near her as a foil.

At rare intervals she saw steel-eyed, grim-mouthed men wandering up and down before the gates of the Villa Fanny, but they never rang the bell, nor spoke to her when she passed them on the street. If she talked of these men, her mother and the Major would exchange amused glances, nothing more.

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If, rightly or wrongly, she hated her mother, she despised her uncle, who was ever bringing to the villa men of money, but of coarse fiber, ostensibly with the view of marrying her off. But Fortune had her dreams, and she was quite content to wait.

There was one man more persistent than the others. Her mother called him Horace, which the Major mellowed into Hoddy. He was tall, blond, good-looking, a devil-may-care, educated, witty, amusing; and in evening dress he appeared to be what it was quite evident he had once been, a gentleman. At first she thought it strange that he should make her, instead of her mother, his confidante. As to what vocation he pursued, she did not know, for he kept sedulous guard over his tongue; but his past, up to that fork in the road where manhood says good-by to youth, was hers. And in this direction, clever and artful as the mother was, she sought in vain to wrest this past from her daughter's lips. To the mother, it was really necessary for her to know who this man really was, had been, knowing thoroughly as she did what he was now.

Persistent he undeniably was, but never coarse nor rude. Since that time he had come back from

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the casino at Monte Carlo, much the worse for wine, she feared him; yet, in spite of this fear, she had for him a vague liking, a hazy admiration. Whatever his faults might be, she stood witness to his great physical strength and courage. He was the only man, among all those who appeared at the Villa Fanny and immediately vanished, who returned again. And he, too, soon grew to be a part of this unreal drama, arriving mysteriously one day and departing the next.

That a drama was being enacted under her eyes she no longer doubted; but it was as though she had taken her seat among the audience in the middle of the second act. She could make neither head nor tail to it.

Whenever she accompanied her mother upon these impromptu journeys, her character, or rather her attitude, underwent a change. She swept aside her dreams; she accepted the world as it was, saw things as they were; laughed, but without merriment; jested, but with the venomed point. It was the reverse of her real character to give hurt to any living thing, but during these forced marches, as the Major humorously termed them, and such they were in

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truth, she could no more stand against giving the cruel stab than, when alone in her garden, she could resist the tender pleasure of succoring a fallen butterfly. She was especially happy in finding weak spots in her mother's armor, and she never denied herself the thrust. Mrs. Chedsoye enjoyed these sharp encounters, for it must be added that she gave as good as she took, and more often than not her thrusts bit deeper and did not always heal.

Fortune never asked questions relative to the family finances. If she harbored any doubts as to their origin, to the source of their comparative luxury, she never put these into speech.

She had never seen her father, but she had often heard him referred to as "that brute" or "that fool" or "that drunken imbecile." If a portrait of him existed, Fortune had not yet seen it. She visited his lonely grave once a year, in the Protestant cemetery, and dreamily tried to conjure up what manner of man he had been. One day she plied her old Italian nurse with questions.

"Handsome? Yes, but it was all so long ago, *cara mia,* that I can not describe him to you."

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"Did he drink?" Behind this question there was no sense of moral obloquy as applying to the dead.

"Sainted Mary! didn't all men drink their very souls into purgatory those unreligious days?"

"Had he any relatives?"

"I never heard of any."

"Was he rich?"

"No; but when the signora, your mother, married him she thought he was."

It was not till later years that Fortune grasped the true significance of this statement. It illumined many pages. She dropped all investigations, concluding wisely that her mother, if she were minded to speak at all, could supply only the incidents, the details.

It was warm, balmy, like May in the northern latitudes. Women wore white dresses and carried sunshades over their shoulders. A good band played airs from the new light-operas, and at one side of the grand-stand were tea-tables under dazzling linen. Fashion was out. Not all her votaries enjoyed polo, but it was absolutely necessary to pretend that they did. When they talked they dis-

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cussed the Spanish dancer who paraded back and forth across the tea-lawn. They discussed her jewels, her clothes, her escort, and quite frankly her morals, which of the four was by all odds the most popular theme. All agreed that she was handsome in a bold way. This modification invariably distinguishes the right sort of women from the wrong sort, from which there is no appeal to a higher court. They could well afford to admit of her beauty, since the dancer was outside what is called the social pale, for all that her newest escort was a prince *incognito*. They also discussed the play at bridge, the dullness of this particular season, the possibility of war between England and Germany. And some one asked others who were the two well-gowned women down in front, sitting on either side of the young chap in pearl-grey. No one knew. Mother and daughter, probably. Anyhow, they knew something about good clothes. Certainly they weren't ordinary tourists. They had seen What's-his-name tip his hat; and this simple act would pass any one into the inner shrine; for the general was not promiscuous. There, the first-half was over. All down for tea! Thank goodness!

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George was happy. He was proud, too. He saw the glances, the nods of approval. He basked in a kind of sunshine that was new. What an ass he had been all his life! To have been afraid of women just because he was Percival Algernon! What he should have done was to have gone forth boldly, taken what pleasures he found, and laughed with the rest of them.

There weren't two other women in all Cairo to compare with these two. The mother, shapely, elegant, with the dark beauty of a high-class Spaniard, possessing humor, trenchant comment, keen deduction and application; worldly, cynical, high-bred. The student of nations might have tried in vain to place her. She spoke the French of the Parisians, the Italian of the Florentines, the German of the Hanoverians, and her English was the envy of Americans and the wonder of the Londoners. The daughter fell behind her but little, but she was more reserved. The worldly critic called this good form: no daughter should try to outshine her widowed mother.

As Fortune sat beside the young collector that afternoon, she marveled why they had given him

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Percival Algernon. Jones was all right, solid and substantial, but the other two turned it into ridicule. Still, what was the matter with Percival Algernon? History had given men of these names mighty fine things to accomplish. Then why ridicule? Was it due to the perverted angle of vision created by wits and humorists in the comic weeklies, who were eternally pillorying these unhappy prefixes to ordinary cognomens? And why this pillorying? She hadn't studied the subject sufficiently to realize that the business of the humorist is not so much to amuse as to warn persons against becoming ridiculous. And Percival Algernon Jones was all of that. It resolved itself into a matter of values, then. Had his surname been Montmorency, Percival Algernon would have fitted as a key to its lock. She smiled. No one but a fond mother would be guilty of such a crime. And if she ever grew to know him well enough, she was going to ask him all about this mother.

What interest had her own mother in this harmless young man? Oh, some day she would burst through this web, this jungle; some day she would see beyond the second act! What then? she never

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troubled to ask herself; time enough when the moment arrived.

"I had an interesting adventure last night, a most interesting one," began George, who was no longer the shy, blundering recluse. They were on the way back to town.

"Tell it me," said Mrs. Chedsoye.

He leaned over from his seat beside the chauffeur of the hired automobile. (Hang the expense on a day like this!) "A fellow brought me a rug last night, one of the rarest outside the museums. How and where he got it I'm not fully able to state. But he had been in a violent struggle somewhere, arms slashed, shins battered. He admitted that he had gone in where many shapes of death lurked. It was a bit irregular. I bought the rug, however. Some one else would have snatched it up if I hadn't. I wanted him to recount the adventure, but he smiled and refused. I tell you what it is, these eastern ports are great places."

"How interesting!" Mrs. Chedsoye's color was not up to the mark. "He was not seriously wounded?"

"Oh, no. He looks like a tough individual. I

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mean, a chap strong and hardy enough to pull himself out of pretty bad holes. He needed the money."

"Did he give his name?" asked Fortune.

"Yes; but no doubt it was assumed. Ryanne and he spelt it with an 'ne,' and humorously explained why he did so."

"Is he young, old, good-looking, or what?"

Mrs. Chedsoye eyed her offspring through narrowed lids.

"I should say that he was about thirty-five, tall, something of an athlete; and there remains some indications that in the flush of youth he was handsome. Odd. He reminded me of a young man who was on the varsity eleven—foot-baller—when I entered my freshman year. I didn't know him, but I was a great admirer of his from the grand-stand. Horace Wadsworth was *his* name."

Horace Wadsworth. Fortune had the sensation of being astonished at something she had expected to happen.

Just before going down to dinner that night, Fortune turned to her mother, her chin combative in its angle.

"I gave Mr. Jones a hundred and fifty pounds

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out of that money you left in my care. Knowing how forgetful you are, I took the liberty of attending to the affair myself."

She expected a storm, but instead her mother viewed her with appraising eyes. Suddenly she laughed mellowly. Her sense of humor was too excitable to resist so delectable a situation.

"You told him, of course, that the money came from me?" demanded Mrs. Chedsoye, when she could control her voice.

"Surely, since it did come from you."

"My dear, my dear, you are to me like the song in *The Mikado*," and she hummed lightly—

> "'To make the prisoner pent
> Unwillingly represent
> A source of innocent merriment,
> Of innocent merriment!'"

"Am I a prisoner, then?"

"Whatever you like; it can not be said that I ever held you on the leash," taking a final look into the mirror.

"What is the meaning of this rug? You and I know who stole it."

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"I have explicitly warned you, my child, never to meddle with affairs that do not concern you."

"Indirectly, some of yours do. You are in love with Ryanne, as he calls himself."

"My dear, you do not usually stoop to such vulgarity. And are you certain that he has any other name?"

"If I were I should not tell you."

"Ah!"

"A man will tell the woman he loves many things he will not tell the woman he admires."

"As wise as the serpent," bantered the mother; but she looked again into the mirror to see if her color was still what it should be. "And whom does he admire?" the Mona Lisa smile hovering at the corners of her lips.

"You," evenly.

Mrs. Chedsoye thought for a moment, thought deeply and with new insight. It was no longer a child but a woman, and mayhap she had played upon the taut strings of the young heart once too often. Still, she was unafraid.

"And whom does he love?"

"Me. Shall I get you the rouge, mother?"

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Still with that unchanging smile, the woman received the stab. "My daughter," as if speculatively, "you will get on. You haven't been my pupil all these years for nothing. Let us go down to dinner."

Fortune, as she silently followed, experienced a sense of disconcertion rather than of elation.

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CHAPTER VI

MOONLIGHT AND POETRY

A BALL followed dinner that night, Wednesday. The ample lounging-room filled up rapidly after coffee: officers in smart uniforms and spurs, whose principal function in times of peace is to get in everybody's way, rowel exposed ankles, and demolish lace ruffles, Egyptians and Turks and sleek Armenians in somber western frock and scarlet eastern fez or *tarboosh*, women of all colors (meaning, of course, as applied) and shapes and tastes, the lean and fat, the tall and short, such as *Billy Taylor* is said to have kissed in all the ports, and tail-coats of as many styles as Joseph's had patches. George could distinguish his compatriots by the fit of the trousers round the instep; the Englishman had his fitted at the waist and trusted

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in Providence for the hang of the rest. This trifling detective work rather pleased George. The women, however, were all Eves to his eye; liberal expanses of beautiful white skin, the bare effect being modified by a string of pearls or diamonds or emeralds, and hair which might or might not have been wholly their own. He waited restlessly for the reappearance of Mrs. Chedsoye and her daughter. All was right with the world, except that he was to sail altogether too soon. His loan had been returned, and he knew that his former suspicions had been most unworthy. Mrs. Chedsoye had never received his note.

Some one was sitting down beside him. It was Ryanne, in evening clothes, immaculate, blasé, pink-cheeked. There are some men so happily framed that they can don ready-made suits without calling your attention to the fact. George saw at once that the adventurer was one of these fortunate individuals.

"Makes a rather good picture to look at; eh?" began Ryanne, rolling a flake-tobacco cigarette. "Dance?"

"No. Wish I could. You've done quick work,"

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with admiring inspection. "Not a flaw anywhere. How do you do it?"

"Thanks. Thanks to you, I might say. I did some tall hustling, though. Strange, how we love these funeral toggeries. We follow the dance and we follow the dead, with never a variation in color. The man who invented the modern evening clothes must have done good business during the day as chief-mourner."

"Why don't you send for your luggage?"

Ryanne caressed his chin. "My luggage is, I believe, in the hands of the enemy. It is of no great importance. I never carry anything of value, save my skin. I'm not like the villain in the melodrama; no incriminating documents, no lost wills, no directions for digging up pirates' gold."

"I suppose you'll soon be off for America?" George asked indifferently.

"I suppose so. By the way, I saw you at the game to-day."

"No! Where were you?"

"Top row. I am going to ask a favor of you. It may sound rather odd to your ears, but I know those two ladies rather well. I kept out of the

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way till I could find some clothes. The favor I ask is that you will not tell them anything regarding the circumstances of our meeting. I am known to them as a globe-trotter and a collector."

"That's too bad," said George contritely. "But I have already told them."

"The devil you have!" Ryanne dropped his cigarette into the ash-tray. "If I remember rightly, you asked me to say nothing."

"I know," said George, visibly embarrassed. "I forgot."

"Well, the fat is in the fire. I dare say that I can get round it. It was risky. Women like to talk. I expect every hour to hear of some one arriving from Bagdad."

"There's no boat from that direction till next week," informed George, who was a stickler on time-tables.

"There are other ways of getting into Egypt. Know anything about racing-camels?"

"You don't believe . . . ?"

"My friend. I believe in all things that haven't been proved impossible. You've been knocking about here long enough to know something of the

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tenacity of the Arab and the East Indian. Given a just cause, an idol's eye or a holy carpet, and they'll follow you round the world ten times, if need be. I never worry needlessly, but I lay out before me all the points in the game. There is one man in Bagdad who will never cease to think of me. This fellow is an Arab, Mahomed-El-Gebel by name, the real article, proud and savage, into whose keeping the Holy Yhiordes was given; Mahomed-El-Gebel, the Pasha's right-hand, a sheik in his own right."

"But you haven't got the rug now."

"No, Mr. Jones, I haven't; but on the other hand, you have. So, here we are together. When he gets through with me, your turn."

George laughed. Ryanne grew thoughtful over this sign. Percival Algernon did not seem exactly worried.

"Aren't you a little afraid?"

"I? Why should I be?" inquired George innocently. "Certainly, whatever your Arab friend's arguments may be, moral or physical, I'm going to keep that Yhiordes."

Was he bluffing? Ryanne wondered. Did he

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really have nerve? Well, within forty-eight hours there would come a test.

"Say, do you know, I rather wish you'd been with me on that trip—that is, if you like a rough game." Ryanne said this in all sincerity.

"I have never been in a rough game, as you call it; but I've often had a strong desire to be, just to find out for myself what sort of a duffer I am."

Ryanne had met this sort of man before; the fellow who wanted to know what stuff he was made of, and was ready to risk his hide to find out. His experience had taught him to expect nothing of the man who knew just what he was going to do in a crisis.

"Did you ever know, Mr. Jones," said Ryanne, his eyes humorous, "that there is an organization in this world of ours, a company that offers a try-out to men of your kidney?"

"What's that? What do you mean?"

"What I say. There is an established concern which will, upon application for a liberal purchase of stock, arrange any kind of adventure you wish."

"What?" George drew in his legs and sat up. "What sort of a jolly is this?"

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"You put your finger upon the one great obstacle. No one will believe that such a concern exists. Yet it is a fact. And why not?"

"Because it wouldn't be real; it would be going to the moon *à la* Coney Island."

"Wrong, absolutely wrong. If I told you that I am a stock-holder in this company, and that the adventure of the Yhiordes rug was arranged for my special benefit, what would you say?"

"Say?" George turned a serious countenance toward the adventurer. "Why, the whole thing is absurd on the face of it. As a joke, it might go; but as a genuine affair, utterly impossible."

"No," quietly. "I admit that it sounds absurd, yes; but ten years ago they'd have locked up, as insane, a man who said that he could fly. But think of last summer at Paris, at Rheims, at Frankfort; the Continental air was full of flying-machines. Bah! It's pretty difficult to impress the average mind with something new. Why shouldn't we cater to the poetic, the romantic side of man? We've concerns for everything else. The fact is, mediocrity is always standing behind the corner with brickbats for the initiative. Believe me or not, Mr. Jones, but

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this company exists. The proof is that you have the rug and I have the scars."

"But in these prosaic times!" murmured George, still skeptical.

"Prosaic times!" sniffed Ryanne. "There's one of your brickbats. They swung it at the head of the first printer. Prosaic times! My friend, this is the most romantic and bewildering age humanity has yet seen. There's more romance and adventure going about on wheels and steel-bottoms than ever there was in the days of Drake and the Spanish galleons. There's an adventure lurking round the nearest corner—romance, too. What this organization does is to direct you; after that you have to shift for yourself. But, like a first-rate physical instructor, they never map out more than a man can do. They gave me the rug. Your bones, on such a quest, would have been bleaching upon the banks of the Tigris."

"What the deuce is this company called?" George was enjoying the conversation immensely.

"The United Romance and Adventure Company, Ltd., of London, Paris, and New York."

"Have you any of the company's paper with you?"

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George repressed his laughter because Ryanne's face was serious enough.

"Unfortunately, no. But if you will give me your banker's address I'll be pleased to forward you the prospectus."

"Knauth, Nachod and Kühne. I am shortly leaving for home. Better send it to New York. I say, suppose a chap buys an adventure that is not up to the mark; can he return it or exchange it for another?"

"No. It's all chance, you know. The rules of the game are steel-bound. We find you an adventure; it's up to you to make good."

"But, once more, suppose a chap gets a little too rough a game, and doesn't turn up for his dividends; what then?"

"In that event," answered Ryanne sadly, "the stock reverts to the general fund."

George lay back in his chair and let go his laughter. "You are mighty good company, Mr. Ryanne."

"Well, well; we'll say nothing more about it. But a moment gone you spoke as if you were game for an exploit."

"I still am. But if I knew the adventure was

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prearranged, as you say, and I was up against a wall, there would be the inclination to cable the firm for more instructions."

Ryanne himself laughed this time. "That's a good idea. I don't believe the company ever thought of such a contingency. But I repeat, our business is to give you the kick-off. After that you have to fight for your own downs."

"The stock isn't listed?" again laughing.

"Scarcely. One man tells another, as I tell you, and so on."

"You send me the prospectus. I'm rather curious to have a look at it."

"I certainly shall do so," replied Ryanne, with gravity unassumed. "Ah! Here come Mrs. Chedsoye and her daughter. If you don't mind, I'll make myself scarce. I do not care to see them just now, after your having told them about the stolen Yhiordes."

"I'm sorry," said George, rising eagerly.

"It's all in the game," gallantly.

George saw him gracefully manœuver his way round the crush toward the stairs leading to the bar. Really, he would like to know more about

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this amiable free-lance. As the old fellows used to say, he little dreamed that destiny, one of those things from Pandora's box, was preparing a deeper and more intimate acquaintance.

"And what has been amusing you, Mr. Jones?" asked Mrs. Chedsoye. "I saw you laughing."

"I was talking with the rug chap. He's a droll fellow. He said that he had met you somewhere, but concluded not to renew the acquaintance, since I told him that his adventure in part was known to you."

"That is foolish. I rather enjoy meeting men of his stamp. Don't you, Fortune?"

"Sometimes," with a dry little smile. "I believe we have met him, mother. There was something familiar about his head. Of course, we saw him only from a distance."

"I do not think there is any real harm in him," said George. "What made me laugh was a singular proposition he set before me. He said he owned stock in a concern called 'The United Romance and Adventure Company'; and that for a specified sum of money, one could have any adventure one pleased."

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"Did you ever hear of such a thing?" cried the mother merrily. Fortune searched her face keenly. "The United Romance and Adventure Company! He must have been joking. What did you say his name is?"

"Ryanne. Joking is my idea exactly," George agreed. "The scheme is to plunge the stock-holder into a real live adventure, and then let him pull himself out the best way he can. Sounds good. He added that this rug business was an instance of the success of the concern. There goes the music. Do you dance, Miss Chedsoye?"

"A little." Fortune was preoccupied. She was wondering what lay behind Mr. Ryanne's amiable jest.

"Go along, both of you," said Mrs. Chedsoye. "I am too old to dance. I prefer watching people." She sat down and arranged herself comfortably. She was always arranging herself comfortably; it was one of the secrets of her perennial youth. She was very lovely, but George had eyes for the daughter only. Mrs. Chedsoye saw this, but was not in the least chagrined.

"It is so many years since I tripped the light fan-

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tastic toe," George confessed, reluctantly and nervously, now that he had bravely committed himself. "It is quite possible that the accent will be primarily upon the trip."

"Perhaps, then," replied the girl, who truthfully was out of tune, "perhaps I had better get my wraps and we'll go outside. The night is glorious."

She couldn't have suggested anything more to his liking. And so, after a little hurrying about, the two young people went outside and began to promenade slowly up and down the mole. Their conversation was desultory. George had dropped back into his shell and the girl was not equal to the task of drawing him out. Once he stumbled over a sleeping beggar, and would have fallen had she not caught him by the arm.

"Thanks. I'm clumsy."

"It's rather difficult to see them in the moonlight; their rags match the pavements."

The Egyptian night, that sapphirine darkness which the flexible imagination peoples with lovely and terrible shades, or floods with mystery and romance and wonder, lay softly upon this strip of verdure aslant the desert's face, the Valley of the

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Nile. The moon, round, brilliant, strangely near, suffused the scarred old visage of the world with phantom silver; the stones of the parapet glowed dully, the pavement glistened whitely, all things it touched with gentleness, lavishing beauty upon beauty, mellowing ugliness or effacing it. The deep blue Nile, beribboned with the glancing lights from the silent feluccas, curling musically along the sides of the frost-like dahabeahs and steamers, rolled on to the sea; and the blue-white arc-lamps, spanning the Great Nile Bridge, took the semblance of a pearl necklace. From time to time a caravan trooped across the bridge into Cairo. The high and low weird notes of the tom-toms, the wheezing protests of the camels, the raucous defiance of the donkeys, the occasional thin music of reeds, were sounds that crossed and recrossed one another, anciently.

"Do you care for poetry, Mr. Jones?"

"I? I used to write it."

"And you aren't afraid to admit it?"

"Well, I shouldn't confess the deed to every one," he answered frankly. "We all write poetry at one time or another; but it's generally not constitutional, and we recover."

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"I do not see why any one should be ashamed of writing poetry."

"Ah, but there is poetry and poetry. My kind and Byron's is born of kindred souls; but he was an active genius, whereas, I wasn't even a passive one. In all great poets I find my own rejected thoughts, as Emerson says; and that's enough for my slender needs. Poets are rather uncomfortable chaps to have round. They are capricious, irritable, temperamental, selfish, and usually demand all the attention."

The little vocal stream dried up again, and once more they listened to the magic sounds of the night. She stopped abruptly to look over the parapet, and his shoulder met hers; after that the world to him was never going to be the same again.

Moonlight and poetry; not the safest channels to sail uncharted. The girl was lonely, and George was lonely, too. His longing had now assumed a definite form; hers moved from this to that, still indefinitely. The quickness with which this definition had come to George rather startled him. His first sight of Fortune Chedsoye had been but yesterday; yet, here he was, not desperately but consciously in

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love with her. The situation bore against all precepts; it ripped up his preconceived ideas of romance as a gale at sea shreds a canvas. He felt a bit panicky. He had always planned a courtship of a year or so, meetings, separations, and remeetings, pleasurable expectations, little junkets to theatres and country places; in brief, to witness the rose grow and unfold. Somewhere he had read or heard that courtship was the plummet which sounded the depths of compatibility. He knew nothing of Fortune Chedsoye, save that she was beautiful to his eyes, and that she was as different from the ordinary run of girls as yonder moon was from the stars. Here his knowledge ended. But instinct went on, appraising and delving and winnowing, and instinct told him what knowledge could not, that she was all his heart desired.

When a man finally decides that he is in love, his troubles begin, the imaginary ones. Is he worthy? Can he always provide for her? Is it possible for such a marvelous creature to love an insignificant chap like himself? And that worst of mental poisons, is she in love with any one else? What to do to win her? The feats of Hercules, of Perseus,

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of Jason: what mad piece of heroism can he lay his hand to that he may wake the slumbering fires, and having roused them, continue to feed them?

Manhood, meaning that decade between thirty and forty, looks upon this phase, abashed. After all, it wasn't so terrible; there were vaster emotions, vaster achievements in life to which in comparison love was as a candle held to the sun.

Again she stopped, leaning over the parapet and staring down at the water swirling past the stone embankment. He did likewise, resting upon his folded arms. Suddenly his tongue became alive; and quietly, without hesitancy or embarrassment, he began to tell her of his school life, his life at home. And the manner in which he spoke of his mother warmed her; and she was strangely and wonderingly attracted.

"Of course, the mother meant the best in the world when she gave me Percival Algernon; and because she meant the best, I have rarely tried to hide them. What was good enough for her to give was good enough for me to keep. It is simply that I have been foolish about it, supersensitive. I should have laughed and accepted the thing as a joke; in-

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stead, I made the fatal move of trying to run away and hide. But, taking the name in full," lightly, "it sounds as incongruous as playing *Traumerei* on a steam-piano."

He expected her to laugh, but her heart was too full of the old ache. This young man, kindly, gentle, intelligent, if shy, was a love-child. And she? An offspring, the loneliest of the lonely, the child that wasn't wanted. Many a time she had thought of flinging all to the winds, of running away and hiding where they never should find her, of working with her own hands for her bread and butter. Little they'd have cared. But always the rebel spirit died within her as she stepped outside the villa gates. To leave behind for unknown privations certain assured comforts, things of which she was fond, things to which she was used, she couldn't do it, she just couldn't. Morally and physically she was a little coward.

"Let us go in," she said sharply. Another moment, and she would have been in tears.

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CHAPTER VII

RYANNE TABLES HIS CARDS

DURING this time Mrs. Chedsoye, the Major, Messrs. Ryanne and Wallace, officers and directors in the United Romance and Adventure Company, Ltd., sat in the Major's room, round the boudoir-stand which had temporarily been given the dignity of a table. The scene would not have been without interest either to the speculative physiognomist or to the dramatist. To each it would have represented one of those astonishing moments when the soul of a person comes out into the open, as one might express it, incautiously, to be revealed in the expressions of the eyes and the mouth. These four persons were about going forward upon a singularly desperate and unusual enterprise. From now on they were no longer to fence with one another,

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to shift from this topic to that, with the indirect manœuvers of a house-cat intent upon the quest of the Friday mackerel. The woman's face was alive with eagerness; the oldest man looked from one to the other with earnest calculation; Wallace no longer hid his cupidity; Ryanne's immobility of countenance was in itself a tacit admission to the burning of all his bridges that he might become a part of this conclave.

"Smuggling," said the Major, with prudent lowering of voice, evidently continuing some previous debate, "smuggling is a fine art, a keen sporting proposition; and the consequences of discovery are never very serious. What's a fine of a thousand dollars against the profits of many successful excursions into the port of New York? Nothing, comparatively. For several years, now, we have carried on this business with the utmost adroitness. Never have we drawn serious attention. We have made two or three blunders, but the suspicions of the secret-service were put to sleep upon each occasion. We have prospered. Here is a gem, let us say, worth on this side a thousand; over there we sell it for enough to give us a clean profit of three or four hundred.

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Forty per cent. upon our investment. That ought to be enough for any reasonable person. Am I right?"

Mrs. Chedsoye alone was unresponsive to this appeal.

"I continue, then. We are making enough to lay by something for our old age. And that's the only goal which never loses its luster. But this affair!"

"Talk, talk," said Mrs. Chedsoye impatiently.

"My dear Kate, allow me to relieve my mind."

"You have done so till the topic is threadbare. It is rather late in the day to go over the ground again. Time is everything just now."

"Admitted. But this affair, Kate, is big; big with dangers, big with pitfalls; there is a hidden menace in every step of it. Mayhap death; who knows? The older I grow, the more I cling to material comforts, to enterprises of small dangers. However, as you infer, there's no going back now."

"No," assented Ryanne, his mouth hard; "not if I have to proceed alone."

She smiled at him. "You talk of danger," speaking to the Major. "What danger can there be?"

"The unforeseen danger, the danger of which we know nothing, and therefore are unable to prepare

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for it. You do not see it, my dear, but it is there, nevertheless."

Wallace nodded approvingly. Ryanne shrugged.

"Failure is practically impossible. And I want excitement; I crave it as you men crave your tobacco."

"And there we are, Kate. It really isn't the gold; it's the excitement of getting it and coming away unscathed. If I could only get you to look at all sides of the affair! It's the Rubicon."

"I accept it as such. I am tired of petty things. I repeat, failure is not possible. Have I not thought it out, detail by detail, mapped out each line, anticipated dangers by eliminating them?"

"All but that one danger of which we know nothing. You're a great woman, Kate. You have, as you say, made ninety-nine dangers out of a hundred impossible. Let us keep an eye out for that hundredth. Our photographs have yet to grace the rogues' gallery."

"With one exception." Ryanne's laughter was sardonic.

"Whose?" shot the Major.

"Mine. A round and youthful phiz, a silky young

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mustache. But rest easy; there's no likeness between that and the original one I wear now."

"You never told us . . . " began Mrs. Chedsoye.

"There was never any need till now. Eight years ago. Certain powers that be worked toward my escape. But I was never to return. You will recollect that I have always remained this side. Enough. What I did does not matter. I will say this much: my crime was in being found out. One venture into New York and out to sea again; they will not have a chance. I doubt if any could recall the circumstances of my meteoric career. You will observe that I am keyed for anything. Let us get to work. It doesn't matter, anyhow."

"You did not . . ." Mrs. Chedsoye hesitated.

"Blood?" reading her thought. "No, Gioconda; my hands are guiltless, at least they were till this Bagdad affair; and I am not sure there. I was a trusted clerk; I gambled; I took money that did not belong to me. And here I am, room number 208."

"It doesn't matter. Come, Kate; don't stare at Hoddy as if he were a new species." The Major

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smoothed the ends of his mustache. "This confession will be good for his soul."

"Yes, Gioconda; I feel easier now. I am heart and soul in this affair. I need excitement, too. Lord, yes. When I went to Bagdad, I had no idea that I should ever lay eyes upon that rug. But I did. And there's the emeralds, too, Major."

The Major rubbed his hands pleasurably. "Yes, yes; the emeralds; I had not forgotten them. One hundred lovely green stones, worth not a penny under thirty thousand. A fine collection. But another idea has taken possession of this teeming brain of mine. Have you noticed how this fellow Jones hovers about Fortune? He's worth a million, if he's worth a cent. I am sure, in pure gratitude, she would see to it that her loved ones were well taken care of in their old age."

"I am going to marry Fortune myself," said Ryanne blandly.

"You?" The Major was nonplussed.

Wallace shuffled his feet uneasily. This blond companion of his was always showing kinks in his nature, kinks that rarely ever straightened out.

"Yes. And why not? What is she to either

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you or her mother? Nothing. Affection you have never given her, being unable. It surprises you; but, nevertheless, I love her, and I am going to marry her."

"Really?" said Mrs. Chedsoye.

"Even so."

"You are a fool, Horace!" with rising fury. So then, the child had not jibed her in a moment of pique?

"Men in love generally are fools. I've never spoken before, because you never absolutely needed me till now. There's my cards, pat."

Mrs. Chedsoye's fury deepened, but not visibly. "You are welcome to her, if she will have you."

"Yes," supplemented the Major; "if she will have you, my friend, take her, and our benedictions."

Ryanne's shoulders stirred suggestively.

"Of course, I expect to have the final word to say on the subject. She is my daughter," said Mrs. Chedsoye.

"A trifling accident, my dear Gioconda," smiled Ryanne; "merely that."

"Just a little oil, just a little oil," the Major pleaded anxiously. "Dash it all, this is no time for

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a row of this silly order. But it's always the way," irritably. "A big enterprise, demanding a single purpose, and a trifle like this to upset it all!"

"I am ready for business at any moment."

"And you, Kate?"

"We'll say no more about it till the affair is over. After that . . ."

"Those who live will see, eh?" Ryanne rolled a cigarette.

"To business, then. In the first place, Mr. Jones must not reach the *Ludwig*."

"He will not." Ryanne spoke with quiet assurance.

"He will not even see that boat," added Wallace, glad to hear the sound of his voice again.

"Good. But, mind, no rough work."

"Leave it all to me," said Ryanne. "The United Romance and Adventure Company will give him an adventure on approval, as it were."

"To you, then. The report from New York reads encouragingly. Our friends there are busy. They are merely waiting for us. From now on Percival Algernon must receive no more mail, telegrams or cables."

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"I'll take care of that also." Ryanne looked at Mrs. Chedsoye musingly.

"His real-estate agent will wire him, possibly to-morrow."

"In that event, he will receive a cable signifying that the transaction is perfectly correct."

"He may also inquire as to what to do with the valuables in the wall-safe."

"He will be instructed to touch nothing, as the people who will occupy the house are old friends." Ryanne smoked calmly.

"Wallace, you will return to New York at once."

"I thought I was wanted here?"

"No longer."

"All right; I'm off. I'll sail on the *Prince Ludwig*, state-room 118. I'll have my joke by the way."

"You will do nothing of the kind. You will have a state-room by yourself," said Mrs. Chedsoye crisply. "And no wine, no cards. If you fail, I'll break you. . . ."

"As we would a churchwarden's pipe, Wallace, my lad." Ryanne gripped his companion by the shoulder, and there was enough pressure in the grip to cause the recipient to wince.

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"Well, well; I'll lay a straight course." Wallace slid his shoulder from under Ryanne's hand.

"To you, then, Hoddy, the business of quarantining our friend Percival. Don't hurt him; simply detain him. You must realize the importance of this. Have you your plans?"

"I'll perfect them to-morrow. I shall find a way, never fear."

"Does the rug come in anywhere?" The Major was curious. It sometimes seemed to him that Ryanne did not always lay his cards face up upon the table.

"It will play its part. Besides, I am rather inclined to the idea of taking it back. It may be the old wishing-carpet. In that case, it will come in handy. Who knows?"

"How much is it worth?"

"Ah, Major, Percival himself could not say exactly. He gave me a thousand pounds for it."

"A thousand pounds!" murmured Wallace.

The Major struck his hands lightly together. Whether in applause or wonder he alone knew.

"And it was worth every shilling of it, too. I'll tell you the story some day. There are a dozen

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ways of suppressing Percival, but I must have something appealing to my artistic side."

"You have never told us your real name, Horace," Mrs. Chedsoye bent toward him.

He laughed. "I must have something to confess to you in the future, dear Gioconda."

"Well, the meeting adjourns, *sine die*."

"What are you going to do with Fortune?" demanded Ryanne.

"Send her back to Mentone."

"What the deuce did you bring her here for, knowing what was in the wind?"

"She expressed a desire to see Cairo again," answered Mrs. Chedsoye.

"We never deny her anything." The Major rose and yawned suggestively.

In the corridor, Ryanne whispered softly: "Why not, Gioconda?"

"She shall never marry a man of your stamp," coldly.

"Charming mother! How tenderly you have cherished her!"

"Horace," calmly enough, "is it wise to anger me?"

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"It may not be wise, but I have never seen you in a rage. You would be magnificent."

"Cease this foolery," patiently. "I am in no mood for it to-night. As an associate in this equivocal business, you do very well; you are necessary. But do not presume too much upon that. For all that I may not have been what a mother should be, I still have some self-respect. So long as I have any power over her, Fortune shall never marry a man so far down in the social scale as yourself."

"Social scale? Gioconda, how you hurt me!" mockingly. "I should really like to know what your idea of that invincible barrier is. Is it because my face is in the rogues' gallery? Surely, you would not be cruel!"

"She is far above us all, my friend," continuing unruffled. "Sometimes I stand in absolute awe of her."

"A marvel! If my recollection is not at fault, many a man has entered the Villa Fanny, with a view to courtship, men beside whom I am as Roland to the lowest Saracen. You never objected to them."

"They had money and position."

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"Magic talisman! And if I had money and position?"

"My objections would be no less strong."

"Your code puzzles me. You would welcome as a son-in-law a man who stole openly the widow's mite, while I, who harass none but the predatory rich, must dwell in the outland? Rank injustice!"

"You couldn't take care of her."

"Yes, I could. With but little effort I could make these two hands as honest as the day is long."

"I have my doubts," smiling a little.

"Suppose, for the sake of an argument, suppose Fortune accepted me?"

Mrs. Chedsoye's good humor returned. She knew her daughter tolerably well; the child had a horror of men. "Poor Horace! Do you build upon that?"

"Less, perhaps, than upon my own bright invention. My suit, then, to be brief, is rejected?"

"Emphatically. I have spoken."

"Oh, well; the feminine prerogative shall be mine, the last word. Good night; *dormi bene!*" He bowed grandly and turned toward his own room.

He possessed that kind of mockery which was the despair of those at whom it was directed. They

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never knew whether his mood was one of harmless fun or of deadly intent. And rather than mistake the one quality for the other, they generally pretended to ignore. Mrs. Chedsoye, who had a similar talent, was one of the few who felt along the wall as one does in the dark, instinctively. To-night she recognized that there was no harmless fun but a real desperateness behind the mask; and she had held in her temper with a firm hand. This was not the hour for a clash. She shivered a little; and for the first time in the six or seven years she had known him, she faced a fear of him. His great strength, his reckless courage, his subtle way of mastering men by appearing to be mastered by them, held her in the thrall of a peculiar fascination which, in quiet periods, she looked upon as something deeper. Marriage was not to her an ideal state, nor was there any man, living or dead, who had appealed to the physical side of her. But he was in the one sex what she was in the other; and while she herself would never have married him, she raged inwardly at the possibility of his wanting another woman.

To her the social fabric which holds humanity to-

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gether was merely a convenience; the moral significance touched neither her heart nor her mind. In her the primordial craving for ease, for material comforts, pretty trinkets and gowns was strongest developed. It was as if this sense had been handed down to her, untouched by contact with progression, from the remote ages, that time between the fall of Roman civilization and where modern civilization began. In short, a beautiful barbarian, whose intellect alone had advanced.

Fortune was asleep. The mother went over to the bed and gently shook the slim, round arm which lay upon the coverlet. The child's nature lay revealed as she opened her eyes and smiled. It did not matter that the smile instantly changed to a frowning inquiry. The mother spoke truly when she said that there were times when she stood in awe of this, her flesh and blood.

"My child, I wish to ask you a question, and for your own good answer truthfully. Do you love Horace?"

Fortune sat up and rubbed her eyes. "No." Had her wits been less scattered she might have paltered.

The syllable had a finality to it that reassured the

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mother more than a thousand protestations would have done.

"Good night," she said.

Fortune lay down again and drew the coverlet up to her chin. With her eyes shut she waited, but in vain. Her mother disrobed and sought her own bed.

Ryanne was intensely dissatisfied with himself. For once his desperate mood had carried him too far. He had made too many confessions, had antagonized a woman who was every bit as clever and ingenious as himself. The enterprise toward which they were moving held him simply because it was an exploit that enticed wholly his twisted outlook upon life. There was a forbidding humor in the whole affair, too, which he alone saw. The possible rewards were to him of secondary consideration. It was the fun of the thing. It was the fun of the thing that had put him squarely upon the wide, short road to perdition, which had made him first a spendthrift, then a thief. The fun of the thing: sinister phrase! A thousand times had he longed to go back, for he wasn't all bad; but door after door had shut behind him; and now the single

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purpose was to get to the end of the road by the shortest route.

He did not deceive himself. His desperate mood was the result of an infernal rage against himself, a rage against the weakness of his heart. Fortune Chedsoye. Why had she not crossed his path at that time when he might have been saved? And yet, would she have saved him? God alone knew.

He heard Jones stirring in his room next door. Presently all became still. To sleep like that! He shrugged, threw off his coat, swept the cover from the stand, found a pack of cards, and played solitaire till the first pallor of dawn announced the new day.

Reclining snugly against the parapet, wrapped in his tattered arbiyeh, or cloak, his head pillowed upon his lean arm, motionless with that pretended sleep of the watcher, Mahomed-El-Gebel kept his vigil. Miles upon miles he had come, across three bleak, cold, blinding deserts, on camels, in trains, on camels again, night and day, day and night, across the soundless, yellow plains. Allah was good to the true believer. The night was chill, but certain fires warmed his blood. All day

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long he had followed the accursed, lying giaour, but never once had he wandered into the native quarters of the city. Patience! What was a day, a week, a year? Grains of sand. He could wait. *Inshalla!*

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CHAPTER VIII

THE PURLOINED CABLE

GEORGE, having made his bargain with conscience relative to the Yhiordes rug, slept the sleep of the untroubled, of the just, of the man who had nothing in particular to get up for. In fact, after having drunk his breakfast cocoa and eaten his buttered toast, he evinced his satisfaction by turning his face away from the attracting morning light and passing off into sleep again. And thereby hangs this tale.

So much depended upon his getting his mail as it came in that morning, that Fate herself must have resisted sturdily the desire to shake him by the shoulder. Perhaps she would have done so but for the serenity of his pose and the infantile smile that lingered for a while round his lips. Fate, as with most of us, has her sentimental lapses.

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The man next door, having no conscience to speak of (indeed, he had derailed her while passing his twentieth meridian!), was up betimes. He had turned in at four; at six he was strolling about the deserted lounging-room, watching the entrances. It is inconceivable how easily mail may be purloined in a large hotel. There are as many ways as points to the wind. Ryanne chose the simplest. He waited for the mail-bag to be emptied upon the head-porter's counter. Nonchalantly, but deftly, while the porter looked on, the adventurer ran through the bulk. He found three letters and a cable, the latter having been received by George's bankers the day before and mailed directly to the hotel. The porter had no suspicion that a bold theft was being committed under his very eyes. Moreover, circumstances prevented his ever learning of it. Ryanne stuffed the spoils into a pocket.

"If any one asks for me," he said, "say that I shall be at my banker's, the Anglo-Egyptian Bank, at ten o'clock."

"Yes, sir," replied the porter, as he began to sort the rest of the mail, not forgetting to peruse the postals.

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Ryanne went out into the street, walking rapidly into town. Mahomed-El-Gebel shook the folds of his cloak and followed. The adventurer did not slacken his gait till he reached Shepheard's Hotel. Upon the steps he paused. Some English troops were marching past, on the way to the railway station; the usual number of natives were patrolling the sidewalks, dangling strings of imitation scarabs; a caravan of pack-camels, laden with cotton, shuffled by haughtily; a blind beggar sat on the curb in front, munching a piece of sugar-cane. Ryanne, assured that no one he knew was about, proceeded into the writing-room, wholly deserted at this early hour.

He sat down at a desk and opened the cable. It contained exactly what he expected. It was a call for advice in regard to the rental of Mr. George P. A. Jones's mansion in New York and the temporary disposing of the loose valuables. Ryanne read it over a dozen times, with puckered brow, and finally balled it fiercely in his fist. Fool! He could not, at that moment, remember the most essential point in the game, the name and office of the agent to

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whom he must this very morning send reply. Hurriedly he fished out the letters; one chance in a thousand. He swore, but in relief. In the corner of one of the letters he saw that for some unknown reason the gods were still with him. Reynolds and Reynolds, estates, Broad Street; he remembered. He wrote out a reply on a piece of hotel paper, intending to copy it off at the cable-office. This reply covered the ground convincingly. "Renting for two months. Old friends. Leave things as they are. P. A." The initials were a little stroke. From some source Ryanne had picked up the fact that Jones's business correspondence was conducted over those two initials. He tore up the cable into small illegible squares and dropped some into one basket and some into another. Next, he readdressed George's mail to Leipzig; another stroke, meaning a delay of two or three months; from the head office of his banker's there to Paris, Paris to Naples, Naples to New York. That Ryanne did not open these letters was in nowise due to moral suasion; whatever they contained could be of no vital importance to him.

"Now, Horace, we shall bend the crook of our

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elbow in the bar-room. The reaction warrants a stimulant."

An hour later the whole affair was nicely off his hands. The cable had cost him three sovereigns. But what was that? *Niente, rien;* nothing; a mere bagatelle. For the first time in weeks a sense of security invaded his being.

It was by now nine o'clock; and Percival Algernon still reposed upon his bed of ease. Let him sleep. Many days were to pass ere he would again know the comfort of linen sheets, the luxury of down under his ear.

What to do? mused the rogue. On the morrow Mr. Jones would leave for Port Saïd. Ryanne shook his head and with his cane beat a light tattoo against the side of his shin. Abduction was rather out of his sphere of action. And yet, the suppression of Percival was by all odds the most important move to be made. He had volunteered this service and accomplish it he must, in face of all obstacles, or poof! went the whole droll fabric. For to him it was droll, and never it rose in his mind that he did not chuckle saturninely. It was a kind of nightmare where one hung in mid-air, one's toes just be-

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yond the flaming dragon's jaws. The rewards would be enormous, but these he would gladly surrender for the supreme satisfaction of turning the poisoned arrow in the heart of that canting hypocrite, that smug church-deacon, the sanctimonious, the sleek, the well-fed first-born. And poor Percival Algernon, for no blame of his own, must be taken by the scruff of his neck and thrust bodily into this tangled web of scheme and underscheme. It was infinitely humorous.

He had had a vague plan regarding Mahomed, guardian of the Holy Yhiordes, but it was not possible for him to be in Cairo at this early date. That he would eventually appear Ryanne never doubted. He knew the Oriental mind. Mahomed-El-Gebel would cross every barrier less effective than death. It was a serious matter to the Moslem. If he returned to the palace at Bagdad, minus the rug, it would mean free transportation to the Arabian Gulf, bereft of the most important part of his excellent anatomy, his head. Some day, if he lived, Ryanne intended telling the exploit to some clever chap who wrote; it would look rather well in print.

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To turn Mahomed against Percival as being the instigator would be an adroit bit of work; and it would rid him of both of them. Gioconda said that she wanted no rough work. How like a woman! Here was a man's game, a desperate one; and Gioconda, not forgetting that it was her inspiration, wanted it handled with gloves! It was bare-hand work, and the sooner she was made to realize this, the better. It was no time for tuning fiddles.

Mahomed out of it, there was a certain English-Bar in the Quarter Rosetti, a place of dubious repute. Many derelicts drifted there in search of employment still more dubious. Dregs, scum; the bottom and the top of the kettle; outcasts, whose hand and animus were directed against society; black and brown and white men; not soldiers of fortune, like Ryanne, but their camp-followers. In short, it was there (and Ryanne still felt a dull shame of it) that Wallace, carrying the final instructions of the enterprise, had found him, sleeping off the effects of a shabby rout of the night before. It was there also that he had heard of the history and the worth of the Yhiordes rug and the possibility of its theft. He laughed. To have gone upon an

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adventure like that, with nothing but the fumes of wine in his head!

For a few pieces of gold he might enroll under his shady banner three or four shining lights who would undertake the disposal of Percival. Not that he wished the young man any harm—no; but business was business, and in some way or another he must be made to vanish from the sight and presence of men for at least two months.

As for Major Callahan's unforeseen danger, the devil could look out for that.

Ryanne consulted his watch, a cheap but trustworthy article, costing a dollar, not to be considered as an available asset. He would give it away later in the day; for he had decided that while he was in funds there would be wisdom in the purchase of a fine gold *Longines*. A good watch, as every one knows, is always as easily converted into cash as a London bank-note, providing, of course, one is lucky enough to possess either. Many watches had he left behind, in this place or in that; and often he had exchanged the ticket for a small bottle with a green neck. Wherever fortune had gone against him heavily at cards, there he might find his

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latest watch. Besides getting a new time-piece, he was strongly inclined to leave the bulk of his little fortune in the hotel-safe. One never could tell.

And another good idea, he mused, as he swung the time-piece into his vest-pocket, would be to add the splendor of a small white stone to his modest scarf. There is only one well-defined precept among the sporting fraternity: when flush, buy jewelry. Not to the cause of vanity, not at all; but precious stones and gold watches constitute a kind of reserve-fund against the evil day. When one has money in the pocket the hand is quick and eager to find it. But jewelry is protected by a certain quality of caution; it is not too readily passed over bars and gaming-tables. While the pawnbroker stands between the passion and the green-baize, there's food for thought.

Having settled these questions to his satisfaction, there remained but one other, how to spend his time. It would be useless to seek the English-Bar before noon. Might as well ramble through the native town and the bazaars. He might pick up some little curio to give to Fortune. So he beckoned to an

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idle driver, climbed into the carriage, and was driven off as if empires hung upon minutes.

Ryanne never wearied of the bazaars in Cairo. They were to him no less enchanting than the circus-parades of his youth. In certain ways, they were not to be compared with those in Constantinople and Smyrna; but, on the other hand, there was more light, more charm, more color. Perhaps the magic nearness of the desert had something to do with it, the rainless skies, the ever-recurring suggestions of antiquity. His lively observation, his sense of the picturesque and the humorous, always close to the surface, gave him that singular impetus which makes man a prowler. This gift had made possible his success in old Bagdad. Some years before he had prowled through the narrow city streets, had noted the windings, the blind-alleys, and had never forgotten. Faces and localities were written indelibly upon his memory.

One rode to the bazaars, but walked through them or mounted donkeys. Ryanne preferred his own legs. So did Mahomed. Once, so close did he come that he could have put his two brown hands round the infidel's throat. But, patience. Did not the

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Koran teach patience among the higher laws? Patience. He could not, madly as he had dreamed, throttle the white liar here in the bazaars. That would not bring the Holy Yhiordes to his hands. He must wait. He must plan to lure the man out at night, then to hurry him into the desert. Out into the desert, where no man might be his master. Oh, the Holy Yhiordes should be his again; it was written.

The cries, the shouts, the tower of Babel reclaimed; the intermingling of the races of the world: the Englishman, the American, the German, the Italian, the Frenchman, the Greek, the Levantine, the purple-black Ethiopian, the bronze Nubian; the veiled women, the naked children; all the color-tones known to art, but predominating, that marvelous faded tint of blue, the Cairene blue, in the heavens, in the waters, in the dyes.

"Make way, O my mother!" bawled a donkey-boy to the old crone peddling matches.

"Backsheesh! Backsheesh!" in the eight tones of the human voice. From the beggar, his brother, his uncle, his grandfather, his children and his children's children. "Backsheesh, backsheesh!"

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"To the right!" was shrilled into Ryanne's ear; and he dodged. A troop of donkeys passed, laden with tourists, unhappy, fretful, self-conscious. A water-carrier brushed against him, and he whiffed the fresh dampness of the bulging goat-skin. A woman, the long, black head-veil streaming out behind in the clutch of the monkey-like hand of a toddling child, carried a terra-cotta water-jar upon her head. The grace with which she moved, the abruptness of the color-changes, caught Ryanne's roving eye and filled it with pleasure.

Dust rose and subsided, eddied and settled; beggars blind and one-eyed squatted in it, children tossed it in play, and beasts of burden shuffled through it.

The roar in front of the shops, the pressing and crowding of customers, the high cries of the merchants; the gurgle of the water-pipes, the pleasant fumes of coffee, the hardy loafers lolling before the khans or caravansaries; a veiled face at a lattice-window; the violet shadows in a doorway; the sunshine upon the soaring mosques; a true believer, rocking and mumbling over his tattered Koran; gold and silver and jewels; amber and copper and brass;

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embroideries and rugs and carpets; and the pest of fleas, the plague of flies, the insidious smells.

Rarely one saw the true son of the desert, the Bedouin. He disdained streets and walls, and only necessity brought him here among the polyglot and the polygon.

Ryanne found himself inspecting "the largest emerald in the world, worth twelve thousand pounds," which looked more like a fine hexagonal of onyx than a gem. It was one of the curiosities of the bazaars, however, and tourists were generally round it in force. To his experienced eye it was no more than a fine specimen of emerald quartz, worth what any fool of a collector was willing to pay for it. From this bazaar he passed on into the next, and there he saw Fortune.

And as Mahomed, always close at hand, saw the hard lines in Ryanne's face soften, the cynical smile become tender, he believed he saw his way to strike.

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CHAPTER IX

THE BITTER FRUIT

FORTUNE had a hearty contempt for persons who ate their breakfast in bed. For her the glory of the day was the fresh fairness of the morning, when every one's step was buoyant, and all life stirred energetically. There was cheer and hope everywhere; men faced their labors with clear eye and feared nothing; women sang at their work. It was only at the close of day that despair and defeat stalked the highways. So she was up with the sun, whether in her own garden or in these odd and mystical cities. Thus she saw the native as he was, not as he later in the day pretended to be, for the benefit of the Feringhi about to be stretched upon the sacrificial stone. She saw, with gladness, the honey-bee thirling the rose, the plowman's share baring

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the soil: the morning, the morning, the two or three hours that were all, all her own. Her mother was always irritable and petulant in the morning, and her uncle never developed the gift of speech till after luncheon.

She had the same love of prowling that lured Ryanne from the beaten paths. She was not inquisitive but curious, and that ready disarming smile of hers opened many a portal.

She was balancing upon her gloved palm, thoughtfully, a Soudanese head-trinket, a pendant of twisted gold-wires, flawed emeralds and second pearls, really exquisite and not generally to be found outside the expensive shops in the European quarters, and there infrequently. The merchant wanted twenty pounds for it. Fortune shook her head, regretfully. It was far beyond her means. She sighed. Only once in a great while she saw something for which her whole heart cried out. This pendant was one of these.

"I will give you five pounds for it. That is all I have with me."

"Salaam, madame," said the jeweler, reaching for the pendant.

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"If you will send it to the Hotel Semiramis this afternoon . . ." But she faltered at the sight of the merchant's incredulous smile.

"I'll give you ten for it; not a piastre more. I can get one like it in the Shâriâ Kâmel for that amount."

Both Fortune and the merchant turned.

"You, Horace?"

"Yes, my child. And what are you doing here alone, without a dragoman?"

"Oh, I have been through here alone many times. I'm not afraid. Isn't it beautiful? He wants twenty pounds for it, and I can not afford that."

She had not seen him in many weeks, yet she accepted his sudden appearance without question or surprise. She was used to his turning up at unexpected moments. Of course, she had known that he was in Cairo: where her mother and uncle were this secretive man was generally within calling. There had been a time when she had eagerly plied him with questions, but he had always erected barriers of evasion, and finally she ceased her importunities, for she concluded that her questions were such. No matter to whom she turned, there was no one to

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answer her questions, questions born of doubt and fear.

"Ten pounds," repeated Ryanne, a hand in his pocket.

The merchant laughed. Here were a young man and his sweetheart. His experience had taught him, and not unwisely, that love is an easy victim, too proud to haggle, too generous to bargain sharply. "Twenty," he reiterated.

"Salaam!" said Ryanne. "Good day!" He drew the somewhat resisting hand of Fortune under his arm and made for the door. "Sh!" he whispered. "Leave it to me." They gained the street.

The merchant was dazed. He had misjudged what he now recognized as an old hand. The two were turning up another street when he ran out, shouting to them and waving the pendant. Ryanne laughed.

"Ten pounds. I am a poor man, effendi, and I need the money. Ten pounds. I am giving it away." The merchant's eyes filled with tears, a trick left to him from out the ruins of his youth, that ready service to forestall the merited rod.

Ryanne counted out ten sovereigns and put the

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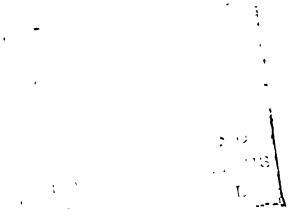

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pendant in Fortune's hand. And the pleasure in his heart was such as he had not known in many days. The merchant wisely hurried back to his shop.

"But . . ." she began protestingly.

"Tut, tut! I have known you since you wore short dresses and tam-o'-shanters."

"I really can not accept it as a gift. Let me borrow the ten pounds."

"And why can't you accept this little gift from me?"

She had no ready answer. She gazed steadily at the dull pearls and the flaky emeralds. She could not ask him where he had got those sovereigns. She could not possibly be so cruel. She could not dissemble in words like her mother. That gold she knew to be a part of a dishonest bargain whose forestep had been a theft—more, a sacrilege. Her honesty was like pure gold, unalloyed, unmixed with sophistic subterfuges. That the young man who had purchased the rug might be mildly peccable had not yet occurred to her.

"Why not, Fortune?" Ryanne was very earnest, and there was a pinch at his heart.

"Because . . ."

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"Don't you like me, just a little?"

"Why, I do like you, Horace. But I do not like any man well enough to accept expensive gifts from him. I do not wish to hurt you, but it is impossible. The only concession I'll make is to borrow the money."

"Well, then, let it go at that." He was too wise to press her.

"And can you afford to throw away ten pounds?" with assumed lightness. "My one permanent impression of you is the young man who was always forced to borrow car-fare whenever he returned from Monte Carlo."

"A fool and his money. But I'm a rich man now," he volunteered. And briefly he sketched the exploit of the Yhiordes rug.

"It was very brave of you. But has it ever occurred to you that it wasn't honest?"

"Honest?" frankly astonished that she should question the ethics. "Oh, I say, Fortune; you don't call it dishonest to get the best of a pagan! Aren't they always getting the best of us?"

"If you had bargained with him and beaten him

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down, it would have been different. But, Horace, you stole it; you admit that you did."

"I took my life in my hands. I think that evened up things."

"No. And you sold it to Mr. Jones?"

"Yes, and Mr. Jones was only too glad to buy it. I told him the facts. He wasn't particularly eager to bring up the ethics of the case. Why, child, what the deuce is a Turk? I shouldn't cry out if some one stole my Bible."

"Good gracious! do you carry one?"

"Well, there's always one on the room-stand in the hotels I patronize."

"I suppose it all depends upon how we look at things."

"That's it. A different pair of spectacles for every pair of eyes."

If only he weren't in love with her! thought the girl. He would then be an amusing comrade. But whenever he met her he quietly pressed his suit. He had never spoken openly of love, for which she was grateful, but his attentions, his little kindnesses, his unobtrusive protection when those other men

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were at the villa, made the reading between the lines no difficult matter.

"What shall you do if this Mahomed you speak of comes?"

"Turn him loose upon our friend Jones," with a laugh.

"And what will he do to him?"

"Carry him off to Bagdad and chop off his head," Ryanne jested.

"Tell me, is there any possibility of Mr. Jones coming to harm?"

"Can't say." Her concern for Percival annoyed him.

"Is it fair, when he paid you generously?"

He did not look into the grave eyes. They were the only pair that ever disconcerted him. "My dear Fortune, it's a question which is the more valuable to me, my skin or Percival's."

"It isn't fair."

"From my point of view it's fair enough. I warned him; I told him the necessary facts, the eventual dangers. He accepted them all with the Yhiordes. I see nothing unfair in the deal, since I risked my own life in the first place."

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"And why must you do these desperate things?"

"Oh, I love excitement. My one idea in life is to avoid the humdrum."

"Is it necessary to risk your life for these excitements? Is your life nothing more to you than something to experiment with?"

"Truth, sometimes I don't know, Fortune. Sometimes I don't care. When one has gambled for big stakes, it is hard to play again for penny points."

"A strong, healthy man like you ought not to court death."

"I do not seek it. My only temptation is to see how near I can get to the Man in the Shroud, as some poet calls it, without being touched. I'll make you my confessor. You see, it is like this. A number of wearied men recently formed a company whereby monotony became an obsolete word in our vocabulary. You must not think I'm jesting; I'm serious enough. This company ferrets out adventures and romances and sells them to men of spirit. I became a member, and the trip to Bagdad is the result. One never has to share with the company. The rewards are all yours. All one has to do is to pay a lump sum down for the adventure fur-

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nished. You work out the end yourself, unhindered and unassisted."

"Are you really serious?"

"Never more so. Now, Percival Algernon has always been wanting an adventure, but the practical side of him has made him hold aloof. I told him about this concern, and he refuses to believe in it. So I am going to undertake to prove it to him. This is confidential. You will say nothing, I know."

"He will come to no harm physically?"

"Lord, no! It will be mild and innocuous. Of course, if any one told him that an adventure was toward for his especial benefit, it would spoil all. I can rely upon your silence?"

She was silent. He witnessed her indecision with distrust. Perhaps he had said too much.

"Won't you promise? Haven't I always been kind to you, Fortune, times when you most needed kindness?"

"I promise to say nothing. But if any harm comes to that young man, either in jest or in earnest, I will never speak to you again."

"I see that, after getting Percival Algernon into an adventure, I've got to cicerone him safely out

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of it. Well, I accept the responsibility." Some days later he was going to recall this assurance.

"Sometimes I wonder . . ." pensively.

"Wonder about what?"

"What manner of man you are."

"I should have been a great deal better man had I met you ten years ago."

"What? When I was eleven?" with a levity intended to steer him away from this channel.

"You know what I mean," he answered, moody and dejected.

She opened her purse and dropped the pendant into it, but did not speak.

"Ten years ago," abstractedly. "What a lot of things may happen in ten years! Deaths, births, marriages," he went on; "the snuffing out of kingdoms and republics; wars, panics, famine; honor to some and dishonor to others. It kind of makes a fellow grind his teeth, little girl; it kind of makes him shut his fists and long to run amuck."

"Why should a strong, intelligent man, such as you are, think like that? You are resourceful and unafraid. Why should you talk like that? You are young, too. Why?"

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He stopped and looked full into her eyes. "Do you really wish to know?"

"Had I better?" with a wisdom beyond her years.

"No, you had better not. I'm not a good man, Fortune, as criterions go. I've slipped here and there; I've gambled and drunk and squandered my time. Why, in my youth I was as model a boy as ever was Percival. Where the divarication took place I can't say. There's always two forks in the road, Fortune, and many of us take the wrong one. It's easier going. Fine excuse; eh? Some persons would call me a scoundrel, a black-leg; in some ways, yes. But in the days to come I want you always to remember the two untarnished spots upon my shield of honor: I have never cheated a man at cards nor run away with his wife. The devil must give me these merits, however painful it may be to him. Ten years ago, only a decade; good Lord! it's like a hundred years ago, sometimes."

Fortune breathed with difficulty. Never before had he taken her into his confidence to such extent. She essayed to speak; the old terror seemed fairly

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to smother her. It was not what he had told her, but what she wished to but dared not ask. She was like Bluebeard's wife, only she had not the moral courage to open the door of the grisly closet. . . . Her mother, her uncle; what of them, ah, what of them? The crooked street vanished; the roar dwindled away; she was alone, all, all alone.

"I suppose I ought not to have told you," he said troubled at the misery he saw gathered in her eyes and vaguely conscious of what had written it there. "Your mother and uncle have been very kind to me. They know less of me than you do. I have been to them a kind of errand-boy; a happy-go-lucky fellow, who cheered them when they had the doldrums." With forced cheerfulness he again took her hand and snuggled it under his arm, giving it a friendly, reassuring pat. "I'll not speak to you of love, child, but a hair of your head is more precious to me than all Midas' gold. Whenever I've thought of you, I've tried to be good. Honestly."

"And can't you go back to the beginning and start anew?" tremulously.

"Can any one go back? The moving finger writes. An hour is a terrible thing when you look

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to see what can happen in it. But, come; sermons! I'd far rather see you smile. Won't you?"

She tried to, but to him it was sadder than her tears would have been.

For an hour they walked through the dim and musty streets. He exerted himself to amuse her and fairly succeeded. But never did the unaccountable fear, that presage of misfortune, sleep in her heart. And at last, when he took her to her carriage and bade her good-by till dinner, a half-formed idea began to grow in her brain: to save Mr. Jones without betraying Ryanne.

The latter's carriage was at the other end of the bazaars; so he strode sullenly through the press, rudely elbowing those who got in his way. An occasional curse was flung after him; but his height, his breadth of shoulder, his lowering face, precluded anything more active. The Moslems had a deal of faith in the efficacy of curses; so the jostled ones rested upon the promise of these, satisfied that directly, or in the near future, Allah would blast the unbelieving dog in his tracks.

What cleverness the mother and scallawag of an uncle had shown to have kept the child in ignorance all these years! That she saw darkly, as through

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a fog, he was perfectly sure. Sooner or later the storm would burst upon her innocent head, and then God alone knew what would become of her. Oh, damn the selfish, sordid world! At that instant a great longing rolled over him to cut loose from all these evil webs, to begin anew somewhere, even if that somewhere were but a wilderness, a clearing in a forest.

This moment flashed and was gone. Next, he reviewed with chagrin and irritation the folly of his ultimatum of the preceding night. He had had not the slightest semblance of a plan in his head. Sifted down, he saw only his savage and senseless humor and the desire to stir up discord. Gioconda was right. Fortune was above them all, in feeling, in instinct, in loyalty. What right had he, roisterer by night that he was, predaceous outlaw, what right had he to look upon Fortune as his own? Harm her! He would have lopped off his right hand first.

Well, he had but little time, and Percival Algernon called for prompt action. The young fool was smitten with Fortune. Any one could see that. As he shouldered his pathway to the carriage, his eyes seeing but not visualizing objects, three brown men glided in between him and the carriage-step.

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CHAPTER X

MAHOMED LAUGHS

THE drawing back of Ryanne's powerful arm was produced by the stimulus of self-preservation; but almost instantly thought dominated impulse, and all indications of belligerency disappeared. The arm sank, relaxed. It was not possible nor politic that Mahomed-El-Gebel meant to take reprisal in this congested quarter. It would have gained him no advantage whatever. And Ryanne's perception of the exact situation enabled him to smile with the cool effrontery of a man inured to sudden dangers.

"Well, well! So you have found your way to Cairo, Mahomed?"

"Yes, effendi," returned Mahomed, with a smile that answered Ryanne's in thought and expression,

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the only perceivable difference being in the accentuated whiteness of his fine teeth. "Yes, I have found you."

"And you have been looking for me?"

"Surely."

Ryanne, with an airy gesture, signified that he wished to enter his carriage. Mahomed, with a movement equally light, implied his determination to stand his ground.

"In a moment, effendi," he said smoothly.

Mahomed spoke English more or less fluently. His career of forty-odd years had been most colorful. Once a young sheik of the desert, of ample following, a series of tribal wars left him unattached, a wanderer without tent, village, or onion-patch. He had first appeared in Cairo. Here he had of necessity picked up a few words of English; and from a laborer in the cotton fields he was eventually graduated to the envied position of dragoman or guide. He tired of this, being nomadic by instinct and inclination. He tried his hand at rugs in Smyrna, failed, and found himself stranded in Constantinople. He drifted, became a stevedore, a hotel porter, burying his pride till that moment when he

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could, in dignity and security, resurrect it. Fortune, hanging fire, relented upon his appointment as *cavass* or messenger to the British Consulate. After a time, he became what he considered prosperous; and like all fanatic pagans of his faith, proposed to reconstruct his religious life by a pilgrimage to Holy Mecca. While there, he had performed a considerable service in behalf of the future Pasha of Bagdad, who thereafter gave him a place in his retinue.

Mahomed was not only proud but wise; and a series of events, sequences of his own shrewdness, pushed him forward till he became in deed, if not in fact, the Pasha's right-hand man in Bagdad. That quaint city, removed as it is from the ordinary highways of the Orient, is still to most of us an echo remote and mysterious; and the present Pasha enjoys great privileges, over property, over life and death; and it is not enlarging upon fact to say that when he deems it necessary to lop off a head, he does so, without consulting his master in Constantinople. It is all in the business of a day. Next to his celebrated pearls and rose-diamonds, the Pasha held as his most precious treasure, the Holy Yhiordes. And for its loss Mahomed knew that his own head

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rested but insecurely upon his lean neck. That his star was still in ascendancy he believed. The Pasha would not be in Bagdad for many weeks. The revolution in Constantinople, the success of the Young Turk party, made the Pasha's future incumbency a matter of conjecture. While he pulled those wires familiar to the politician, Mahomed set out bravely to recover the stolen rug. He was prepared to proceed to any length to regain it, even to the horrible (to his Oriental mind) necessity of buying it. He retained his travel-worn garments circumspectly, for none would believe that his burnouse was well lined with English bank-notes.

"Well?" said Ryanne, whirling his cane. He was by no means at ease. There was going to be trouble somewhere along the road.

"I have come for the Yhiordes, effendi."

"The rug? That's too bad. I haven't it."

"Who has?" One fear beset Mahomed's heart: this dog, whom he called effendi, might have sold it, since that must have been the ultimate purpose of the theft. And if he had sold it to one who had left Egypt . . . Mahomed's neck grew cold. "Who has it, effendi? Is the man still in Cairo?"

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"Yes. If you and your two friends will come with me to the English-Bar, I'll explain many things to you," assured Ryanne, beginning, as he believed, to see his way forward. "Don't be afraid. I'm not setting any trap for you. I'll tell you truthfully that I didn't expect to see you so soon. If you'll come along I'll do the best I can to straighten out the matter. What do you say?"

Mahomed eyed him with keen distrust. This white man was as strong in cunning as he was in flesh. He had had practical demonstrations. Still, whatever road led to the recovery of the rug must needs be traveled. His arm, though it still reposed in a sling, was not totally helpless. It stood three to one, then. He spoke briefly to his companions, over whom he seemed to have some authority. These two inventoried the smooth-faced Feringhi. One replied. Mahomed approved. Three to one, and in these streets many to call upon, in case of open hostilities. The English-Bar Mahomed knew tolerably well. He had known it in the lawless and reveling eighties. It would certainly be neutral ground, since the proprietor was a Greek. With a dignified sweep of his hand, he signed for Ryanne

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to get into the carriage. Ryanne did so, relieved. He was certain that he could bring Mahomed round to a reasonable view of the affair. He was even willing to give him a little money. The three Arabs climbed in beside him, and the journey to the hostelry was made without talk. Ryanne pretended to be vastly interested in the turmoil through which the carriage rolled, now swiftly, now hesitant, now at a standstill, and again tortuously. Once Mahomed felt beneath his burnouse for his money; and once Ryanne, in the pretense of seeking a cigar, felt for his. They were rather upon even terms in the adjudication of each other's character.

The English-Bar was not the most inviting place. Sober, Ryanne had never darkened its doors. The odor of garlic prevailed over the lesser smells of bad cooking. It was lighted only from the street, by two windows and a door that swung open all the days in the year. The windows were generally half obscured by bills announcing boxing-matches, wrestling-bouts and the lithographs of cheap theaters. The walls were decorated in a manner to please the inherent Anglo-Saxon taste for strong men, fast horses, and pink-tighted Venuses. A few iron-

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topped tables littered both room and sidewalk, and here were men of a dozen nationalities, sipping coffee, drinking beer, or solemnly watching the water-bubbles in their *sheeshas,* or pipes.

A curious phase of this class of under-world is that no one is curious. Strangers are never questioned except when they invite attention, which they seldom do. So, when Ryanne and his quasi-companions entered, there wasn't the slightest agitation. A blowsy barmaid stood behind the bar, polishing the copper spigots. Ryanne threw her a greeting, to which she responded with a smirk that once upon a time had been a smile. He, being master of ceremonies, selected a table in the corner. The four sat down, and Ryanne plunged intrepidly into the business under hand. To make a tool of Mahomed, if not an ally, toward this he directed his effort. Half a dozen times, Mahomed dropped a word in Arabic to the other two, who understood little or no English.

"So, you see, Mahomed, that's the way the matter stands. I'm not so much to blame as you think. Here this man Jones has me in a vise. If I do not get this bit of carpet, off I go, into the dark, into

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nothing, beaten. I handled you roughly, I know. But could I help it? It was my throat or yours. You're no chicken. You and that other chap made things exciting."

Mahomed accepted this compliment to his prowess in silence. Indeed, he gazed dreamily over Ryanne's head. The other fellow wouldn't trouble any one again. To Mahomed it had not been the battle, man to man; it had been the guile and trickery leading up to it. He had been bested at his own game, duplicity, and that irked him. Death, he, as his kind, looked upon with Oriental passivity. Ah, well! The game was to have a second inning, and he proposed to play it in strictly Oriental ways.

"How much did he give you for it?"

The expression upon Ryanne's face would have deceived any one but Mahomed. "Give for it!" indignantly. "Why, that's the whole trouble. All my trouble, all the hard work, and not a piaster, not a piaster! Can't you understand, I *had* to do it?"

"Is he going to sell it?"

"Sell it? Not he! He's a collector, and crazy over the thing."

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Mahomed nodded. He knew something of the habits of collectors. "Is he still in Cairo, and where may he be found?"

Ryanne began to believe that the game was going along famously; Mahomed was sure of it.

"He is George P. A. Jones, of Mortimer & Jones, rich rug dealers of New York. Money no object."

Though his face did not show it, Mahomed was singularly depressed by this news. If this man Jones had money, of what use was his little packet of notes?

"I must have that rug, effendi. There are two reasons why: it is holy, and the loss of it means my head."

"Good riddance!" thought Ryanne, a sympathetic look upon his face.

"What have you to suggest in the way of a plan?" asked Mahomed.

Ryanne felt a tingle of jubilation. He saw nothing but plain-sailing into port. But Mahomed had arranged to guide his craft into the whirlpool. Unto himself he kept up a ceaseless reiteration of—"Patience, patience, patience!"

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Said Ryanne: "You do not care how you get the rug, so long as you do get it?"

"No, effendi." Mahomed smiled.

"A little rough work wouldn't disturb you?"

"No, it would not."

"Well, then, listen to me. Suppose you arrange to take my friend Jones into the desert for a little trip. Be his dragoman for a while. In fact, kidnap him, abduct him, steal him. You can hold him in ransom for the rug and a nice little sum of money besides."

"Can they do such things these days in Cairo?"

"Why not?"

"Truly, why not?" Mahomed sat thoughtfully studying the outrageous prints on the cracked walls. Had he dared he would have laughed. And he had thought this dog cunning beyond all his kind! "I agree. But the arrangements I must leave to you. Bring him here at nine o'clock to-night," he continued, leaning across the table impressively, "and I will give you one hundred pounds English."

Ryanne quickly assumed the expression needed to meet such splendid news. "I say, Mahomed, that is pretty square, after what has passed between us."

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"It is nothing," gallantly.

If Ryanne laughed in his sleeve, Mahomed certainly found ample room in his for such silent and figurative cachinnations. He knew very well that Ryanne had received a goodly sum for his adventure. No man took his life in his hand to cancel an obligation which was not based upon disinterested friendship; and already the man had disavowed any such quality. Also, he had not been a seller of rugs himself, or guardian of the Yhiordes all these years, without having had some contact with collectors. Why, if there was one person dear at this moment to Mahomed-El-Gebel's heart, it was this man sitting opposite. And he wanted him far more eagerly than the rug; only, the rug must be regained, for its loss was a passport into paradise; and he wasn't quite prepared to be received by the houris.

"Mr. Jones, then, shall be here promptly at nine," declared Ryanne, beckoning the barmaid. "What will you have?"

Mahomed shook his head. His two companions, gathering the significance of the gesture, likewise declined.

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"A smoke, then?"

A smiling negative.

"Beware of the Greek bearing gifts," laughed Ryanne. "All right. You won't mind if I have a beer to the success of the venture?"

"No, effendi."

Ryanne drank the lukewarm beverage, while Mahomed toyed with his turquoise ring, that sacred badge of an honorable pilgrimage to Holy Mecca.

"The young lady, effendi; she was very pretty. Your sister?" casually inquired Mahomed.

"Oh, no. She is a young lady I met at the hotel the other day."

The liar! thought the Moslem, as he recalled the light in Ryanne's eyes and the tenderness of his smiles. Apparently, however, Mahomed lost interest directly. "At nine o'clock to-night, then, this collector will arrive to become my guest?"

"By hook or crook," was the answer. "I'll have him here. Cash upon delivery, as they say."

"Cash upon delivery," Mahomed repeated, the phrase being familiar to his tongue.

"Frankly, I want this man out of the way for a while."

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"Ah!"

"Yes. I want a little revenge for the way he has treated me."

"So it is revenge?" softly. Traitorous to both sides.

"And when I get him here?"

"Leave the rest to me."

"Good. I'm off, then. Take him to Bagdad. It will be an experience for him. But when you get him there, keep an eye out for the Shah Abbas in the Pasha's work-room."

The affair had gone so smoothly that Ryanne's usual keenness fell below the mark; fatuity was the word. There had been so many twists to the morning that his abiding distrust of every one became, for the time being, edgeless. The trick of purloining the cable had keyed him high; the subsequent meeting of Fortune had depressed him. And besides, he was too anxious to be rid of Jones to consider the possibilities of Mahomed's state of mind.

He got up, paid his score, turned a jest for the amusement of the barmaid, and went out to his carriage. His deduction still fallow, he rode away. Lord! how easy it had been. Not a hitch anywhere.

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And here, for days, he had imagined all sorts of things, and his dreams, a jumble of dungeons, of tortures. He understood. The old rascal's own head hung in the balance. That's what saved him. To Mahomed the rug was the paramount feature; revenge (and he knew that Mahomed was longing madly, fiercely for it) must wait. And when Mahomed turned his attention to this phase, why, he, Ryanne, would be at the other side of the Atlantic. It was very hard not to drop off at Shepheard's and confide the whole droll conspiracy to a bottle with a green and gilded neck. But, no; he had had no sleep the night before; wine and want of rest would leave him witless when the time came to see that Percival was safely stowed away. A fine joke, a monstrous fine joke! By-by, Percival, old chap; pleasant journey. The United Romance and Adventure Company gives you this little romance upon approval. If you do not like it, return it . . . if you can!

Mahomed sat perfectly still in his chair. His two companions watched him carefully. The mask had fallen, and their master's face was not pleasant to see. Suddenly he laughed. The barmaid stopped

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at her work. She had somewhere heard laughter like that. It gave her a shiver. Where had she heard it? Yes, that was it. A man who had played the devil in an opera called *Fawst* or something like that. Would she ever see dear old foggy London again? With a vain sigh she went on rinsing the glasses and coffee-cups.

When George rolled out of bed it was eleven. He bathed and dressed, absolutely content, regretless of the morning hours he had wasted. Truth to tell, he hadn't enjoyed sleep so thoroughly in weeks. He set to work, ridding the room of its clutter of books and clothes and what-nots. Might as well get the bulk of his packing out of the way while he thought of it.

Why had he been in such a dreadful hurry to pull out? Cairo was just now the most delightful place he knew of. To leave behind the blue skies and warm sunshine, and to face instead the biting winds and northern snows, rather dispirited him. He paused, a pair of trousers dangling from his hand. Pshaw! Why not admit it frankly and honestly? Wherever Fortune Chedsoye was or

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might be, there was the delectable country. He hadn't thought to ask her when she was to leave, nor whither she was to go. The abruptness with which she had left him the night before puzzled rather than disturbed him. Oh, well; this old planet was neither so deep nor so round as it had once been. What with steamships and railroads, the so-called four ends were drawn closely together. He would ask her casually, as if it did not particularly matter. In Naples it would be an easy matter to change his booking to New York. From Naples to Mentone was only a question of a few hours.

"It doesn't seem possible, George, old boy, does it? But it's true; and there's no use trying to fool yourself that it isn't. Fortune Chedsoye; it will be a shame to add Jones to it; but I'm going to try."

He pressed down the last book, the last collar, the last pair of shoes, and sat upon the lid of the trunk. He growled a little. The lock was always bothering him. It was wonderful how many things a chap could take out of a trunk and how plagued few he could put back. It did not seem to relieve the pressure if he added a steamer-trunk here or a suit-case there; there was always just so much there

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wasn't any room for. Truly, it needed a woman's hand to pack a trunk. However his mother in the old school-days had got all his belongings into one trunk was still an unsolved mystery.

Stubborn as the lock was, perseverance overcame it. George then, as a slight diversion, spread the ancient Yhiordes over the trunk and stared at it in pleasurable contemplation. What a beauty it was! What exquisite blue, what soft reds, what minute patterns! And this treasure was his. He leaned down upon it with his two hands. A color stole into his cheeks. It had its source in an old confusion: school-boys jeering a mate seen walking home from school with a girl. It was all rot, he perfectly knew, this wishing business; and yet he flung into the sun-warmed, sun-gilded space an ardent wish, sent it speeding round the world from east to west. Fast as heat, fast as light it traveled, for no sooner had it sprung from his mind than it entered the window of a room across the corridor. Whether the window was open or shut was of no importance whatever. Such wishes penetrated and went through all obstacles. And this one touched Fortune's eyes, her hair, her lips; it caressed her in

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a thousand happy ways. But, alas! such wishes are without temporal power.

Fortune never knew. She sat in a chair, her fingers locked tensely, her eyes large and set in gaze, her lips compressed, her whole attitude one of impotent despair.

George did not see her at lunch, and consequently did not enjoy the hour. Was she ill? Had she gone away? Would she return before he started? He greeted the Major as one greets a long-lost friend; and by gradations George considered clever indeed, brought the conversation down to Fortune. No, the Major did not know where she was. She had gone early to the bazaars. Doubtless she was lunching alone somewhere. She had the trick of losing herself at times. Mrs. Chedsoye was visiting friends at Shepheard's. When did Mr. Jones leave for America? What! on the morrow? The Major shook his head regretfully. There was no place like Cairo for Christmas.

George called a carriage, drove about the principal streets and shopping districts, and used his eyes diligently; but it was love's labor lost. Not even when he returned at tea-time did he see her. Why

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hadn't he known and got up? He could have shown her the bazaars; and there wasn't a dragoman in Cairo more familiar with them than he. A wasted day, totally wasted. He hung about the lounging-room till it was time to go up and dress for dinner. To-night (as if the gods had turned George's future affairs over to the care of Momus) he dressed as if he were going to the opera: swallow-tail, white vest, high collar and white-lawn cravat, opera-Fedora, and thin-soled pumps; all those habiliments and demi-habiliments supposed to make the man. When he reached what he thought to be the glass of fashion and the mold of form, he turned for the first time toward his trunk. He did not rub his eyes; it wasn't at all necessary; one thing he saw, or rather did not see, was established beyond a doubt, as plainly definite as two and two are four. The ancient Yhiordes had taken upon itself one of the potentialities of its fabulous prototype, that of invisibility: it was gone.

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CHAPTER XI

EPISODIC

FORTUNE had immediately returned from the bazaars. And a kind of torpor blanketed her mind, usually so fertile and active. For a time the process of the evolution of thought was denied her; she tried to think, but there was an appalling lack of continuity, of broken threads. It was like one of those circumferential railways: she traveled, but did not get anywhere. Ryanne had told her too much for his own sake, but too little for hers. She sat back in the carriage, inert and listless, and indeterminedly likened her condition to driftwood in the ebb and flow of beach-waves. The color and commotion of the streets were no longer absorbed; it was as if she were riding through emptiness, through the unreality of a dream. She was oppressed and stifled, too; harbinger of storms.

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Mechanically she dismissed the carriage at the hotel, mechanically she went to her room, and in this semiconscious mood sat down in a chair, and there George's wish found her, futilely. Oh, there was one thing clear, clear as the sky outside. All was not right; something was wrong; and this wrong upon one side concerned her mother, her uncle and Ryanne, and upon the other side, Mr. Jones. Think and think as she might, her endeavors gave her no single illumination. Four blind walls surrounded her. The United Romance and Adventure Company—there could not possibly be such a thing in existence; it was a jest of Ryanne's to cover up something far more serious.

She pressed her eyes with a hand. They ached dully, the dull pain of bewilderment, which these days recurred with frequency. A sense of time was lacking; for luncheon hour came and passed without her being definitely aware of it. This in itself was a puzzle. A jaunt, such as she had taken that morning, always keened the edge of her appetite; and yet, there was no craving whatever.

Where was her mother? If she would only come now, the cumulative doubts of all these months

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should be put into speech. They had treated her as one would treat a child; it was neither just nor reasonable. If not as a child, but as one they dared not trust, then they were afraid of her. But why? She pressed her hands together, impotently. Ryanne, clever as he was, had made a slip or two which he had sought to cover up with a jest. Why should he confess himself to be a rogue unless his tongue had got the better of his discretion? If he was a rogue, why should her mother and her uncle make use of him, if not for roguery's sake? They were fools, fools! If they had but seen and understood her as she was, she would have gone to the bitter end with them, loyally, with sealed lips. But no; they had chosen not to see; and in this had morally betrayed her. Ah, it rankled, and the injustice of it grew from pain to fury. At that moment, had she known anything, she certainly would have denounced them. Of what use was loyalty, since none of them sought it in her?

The Major was wiser than he knew when he spoke of the hundredth danger, the danger unforeseen, the danger against which they could make no preparation. And he would have been first to sense

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the irony of it could he have seen where this danger lay.

Why should they wish the pleasant young man out of the way? Why should Ryanne wish to inveigle him into the hands of this man Mahomed? Was it merely self-preservation, or something deeper, more sinister? Think! Why couldn't she think of something? It was only a little pleasure trip to Cairo, they had told her, and when she had asked to go along, they seemed willing enough. But they had come to this hotel, when formerly they had always put up at Shepheard's. And here again the question, why? Was it because Mr. Jones was staying here? She liked him, what little she had seen of him. He was out of an altogether different world than that to which she was accustomed. He was neither insanely mad over cards nor a social idler. He was a young man with a real interest in life, a worker, notwithstanding that he was reputed to be independently rich. And her mother had once borrowed money of him, never intending to pay it back. The shame of it! And why should she approach him the very first day and recall the incident, if not with the ulterior purpose of using him

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further? As a ball strikes a wall only to rebound to the thrower, so it was with all these questions. There was never any answer.

Tired out, mentally and physically, she laid her head upon the cool top of the stand. And in this position her mother, who had returned to dress for tea, found her. Believing Fortune to be asleep, Mrs. Chedsoye dropped a hand upon her shoulder.

Fortune raised her head.

"Why, child, what is the matter?" the mother asked. The face she saw was not tear-stained; it was as cold and passionless as that by which sculptors represent their interpretations of Justice.

"Matter?" Fortune spoke, in a tone that did not reassure the other. "In the first place I have only one real question to ask. It depends upon how you answer it. Am I really your daughter?"

"Really my daughter?" Mrs. Chedsoye stepped back, genuinely astonished. "Really my daughter? The child is mad!" as if addressing an imaginary third person. "What makes you ask such a silly question?" She was in a hurry to change her dress, but the new attitude of this child of hers warranted some patience.

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"That is no answer," said Fortune, with the unmoved deliberation of a prosecuting attorney.

"Certainly you are my daughter."

"Good. If you had denied it, I should have held my peace; but since you admit that I am of your flesh and blood, I am going to force you to recognize that in such a capacity I have some rights. I did not ask to come into this world; but insomuch as I am here, I propose to become an individual, not a thing to be given bread and butter upon sufferance. I have been talking with Horace. I met him in the bazaars this morning. He said some things which you must answer."

"Horace? And what has he said, pray tell?" Her expression was flippant, but a certain inquietude penetrated her heart and accelerated its beating. What had the love-lorn fool said to the child?

"He said that he was not a good man, and that you tolerated him because he ran errands for you. What kind of errands?"

Mrs. Chedsoye did not know whether to laugh or take the child by the shoulders and shake her soundly. "He was laughing when he said that. Errands? One would scarcely call it that."

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"Why did you renew the acquaintance with Mr. Jones, when you knew that you never intended paying back that loan?"

Here was a question, Mrs. Chedsoye realized, from the look of the child, that would not bear evasion.

"What makes you think I never intended to repay him?"

Fortune laughed. It did not sound grateful in the mother's ears.

"Mother, this is a crisis; it can not be met by counter-questions nor by flippancy. You know that you did not intend to pay him. What I demand to know is, why you spoke to him again, so affably, why you seemed so eager to enter into his good graces once more. Answer that."

Her mother pondered. For once she was really at a loss. The unexpectedness of this phase caught her off her balance. She saw one thing vividly, regretfully: she had missed a valuable point in the game by not adjusting her play to the growth of the child, who had, with that phenomenal suddenness which still baffles the psychologists, stepped out of girlhood into womanhood, all in a day.

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What a fool she had been not to have left the child at Mentone!

"I am waiting," said Fortune. "There are more questions; but I want this one answered first."

"This is pure insolence!"

"Insolence of a kind, yes."

"And I refuse to answer. I have some authority still."

"Not so much, mother, as you had yesterday. You refuse to explain?"

"Absolutely!"

"Then I shall judge you without mercy." Fortune rose, her eyes blazing passionately. She caught her mother by the wrist, and she was the stronger of the two. "Can't you understand? I am no longer a child, I am a woman. I do not ask, I demand!" She drew the older woman toward her, eye to eye. "You palter, you always palter; palter and evade. You do not know what frankness and truth are. Is this continual evasion calculated to still my distrust? Yes, I distrust you, you, my mother. You have made the mistake of leaving me alone too much. I have always distrusted you, but I never knew why."

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Mrs. Chedsoye tugged, but ineffectually. "Let go!"

"Not till I have done. Out of the patchwork, squares have been formed. What of the men who used to come to the villa and play cards with Uncle George, the men who went away and never came back? What of your long disappearances of which I knew nothing except that one day you vanished and upon another you came back? Did you think that I was a fool, that I had no time to wonder over these things? You have never tried to make a friend of me; you have always done your best to antagonize me. Did you hate my father so much that, when his death put him out of range, you had to concentrate it upon me? My father!" Fortune roughly flung aside the arm. "Who knows about him, who he was, what he was, what he looked like? As a child, I used to ask you, but never would you speak. All I know about him nurse told me. This much has always burned in my mind: you married him for wealth that he did not have. What do you mean by this simple young man across the corridor?"

Mrs. Chedsoye was pale, and the artistic touch

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of rouge upon her cheeks did not disguise the pallor. The true evidence lay in the whiteness of her nose. Never in her varied life had she felt more helpless, more impotent. To be wild with rage, and yet to be powerless! That alertness of mind, that mental buoyancy, which had always given her the power to return a volley in kind, had deserted her. Moreover, she was distinctly alarmed. This little fool, with a turn of her hand, might send tottering into ruins the skilful planning of months.

"Are you in love with him?" aiming to gain time to regather her scattered thoughts.

"Love?" bitterly. "I am in a fine mood to love any one. My question, my question," vehemently; "my question!"

"I refuse absolutely to answer you!" Anger was first to reorganize its forces; and Mrs. Chedsoye felt the heat of it run through her veins. But, oddly enough, it was anger directed less toward the child than toward her own palpable folly and oversight.

"Then I shall leave you. I will go out into the world and earn my own bread and butter. Ah," a little brokenly, "if you had but given me a little

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kindness, you do not know how loyal I should have been to you! But no; I am and always have been the child that wasn't wanted."

The despair in the gesture that followed these words stirred the mother's calloused heart, moved it strangely, mysteriously. "My child!" she said impulsively, holding out her hands.

"No." Fortune drew back. "It is too late."

"Have it so. But you speak of going out into the world to earn your bread and butter. What do you know about the world? What could you do? You have never done anything but read romantic novels and moon about in the flower-garden. Foolish chit! Harm Mr. Jones? Why? For what purpose? I have no more interest in him than if he were one of those mummies over in the museum. And I certainly meant to repay him. I should have done so if you hadn't taken the task upon your own broad shoulders. I am in a hurry. I am going out to Mena House to tea. I've let Celeste off for the day; so please unhook my waist and do not bother your head about Mr. Jones." She turned her back upon her daughter, quite confident that she had for the time suppressed the in-

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cipient rebellion. She heard Fortune crossing the room. "What are you doing?" petulantly.

"I am ringing for the hall-maid." And Fortune resumed her chair, picked up her Baedeker, and became apparently absorbed over the map of Assuan.

Again wrath mounted to the mother's head. She could combat anger, tears, protestations; but this indifference, studied and unfilial, left her weaponless; and she was too wise to unbridle her tongue, much as she longed to do so. She was beaten. Not an agreeable sensation to one who counted only her victories.

"Fortune, later you will be sorry for this spirit," she said, when she felt the tremor of wrath no longer in her throat.

Fortune turned a page, and jotted down some notes with a pencil. Sad as she was at heart, tragic as she knew the result of this outbreak to be, she could hardly repress a smile at the thought of her mother's discomfiture.

And so the chasm widened, and went on widening till the end of time.

Mrs. Chedsoye was glad that the hall-maid knocked and came in just then. It at least saved

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her the ignominy of a retreat. She dressed, however, with the same deliberate care that she had always used. Nothing ever deranged her sense of proportion relative to her toilet, nothing ever made her forget its importance.

"Good-by, dear," she said. "I shall be in at dinner." If the maid had any suspicion that there had been a quarrel, she should at least be impressed with the fact that she, Mrs. Chedsoye, was not to blame for it.

Fortune nibbled the end of her pencil.

The door closed behind her mother and the maid. She waited for a time. Then she sprang to the window and stood there. She saw her mother driven off. She was dressed in pearl-grey, with a Reynolds' hat of grey velour and sweeping plumes: as handsome and distinguished a woman as could be found that day in all Cairo. The watcher threw her Baedeker, her note-book, and her pencil violently into a corner. It had come to her at last, this thing she had been striving for since noon. She did not care what the risks were; the storm was too high in her heart to listen to the voice of caution. She would do it; for she judged it the one thing,

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in justice to her own blood, she must accomplish. She straightway dressed for the street; and if she did not give the same care as her mother to the vital function, she produced an effect that merited comparison.

She loitered before the porter's bureau till she saw him busily engaged in answering questions of some women tourists. Then, with a slight but friendly nod, she stepped into the bureau and stopped before the key-rack. She hung up her key, but took it down again, as if she had changed her mind. At least, this was the porter's impression as he bowed to her in the midst of the verbal bombardment. Fortune went up-stairs. Ten or fifteen minutes elapsed, when she returned, hung up the key, and walked briskly toward the side-entrance at the very moment George, in his fruitless search of her, pushed through the revolving doors in front. And all the time she was wondering how it was that her knees did not give under. It was terrible. She balanced between laughter and tears, hysterically.

She had gone scarcely a hundred yards when she was accosted by a tall Arab whom she indistinctly

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recollected having seen before; where, she could not definitely imagine. It was the ragged green turban that cleared away her puzzlement. The Arab was the supposed beggar over whom Percival (how easily she had fallen into the habit of calling him that!) had stumbled. He stood so tall and straight that she knew he wasn't going to beg; so naturally she stopped. Without a word, without even a look that expressed anything, he slipped a note into her hand, bowed with Oriental gravity, and stepped aside for her to proceed. She read the note hastily as she continued her way. Horace? Why should he wish to meet her that evening, at the southeast corner of the Shâri'a Mahomoud-El-Fäläki, a step or so from the British Consulate's? And she mustn't come in a carriage nor tell any one where she was going? Why all such childish mystery? He could see her far more conveniently in the lounging-room of the hotel. She tore the note into scraps and flung them upon the air. She was afraid. She was almost certain why he wished to meet her where neither her mother's nor her uncle's eyes would be within range. Should she meet him? Deeper than this, dared she? Why had she come

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to Cairo, when at Mentone she had known peace, such peace as destiny was generous enough to dole out to her? And now, out of this tolerable peace, a thousand hands were reaching to rend her heart, to wring it. She decided quickly. Since she had come this far, to go on to the end would add but little to her burden. Better to know all too soon than too late.

That the note had not been directed to her and that she was totally unfamiliar with Ryanne's handwriting, escaped her. She had too many other things upon her mind to see all things clearly, especially such trifles. She finished her walk, returning by the way she had gone, gave the key to the lift-boy, and in her room dropped down upon the bed, dry-eyed and weary. The most eventful day she had ever known.

And all the while George sat by the window and watched, and at length fell into a frame of mind that was irritable, irascible and self-condemnatory. And when he found that his precious Yhiordes was gone, his condition was the essence of all disagreeable emotions. It was beyond him how any one could have stolen it. He never failed to lock his

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door and leave the key with the porter. And surely, only a man with wings could have gained entrance by the window. Being a thorough business man among other accomplishments, he reported his loss at once to the management; and the management set about the matter with celerity. At half after seven every maid and servant in the hotel had been questioned and examined, without the least noticeable result. The rug was nowhere to be found. George felt the loss keenly. He was not so rich that he could afford to lose both the rug and the thousand pounds he had paid for it. His first thought had been of Ryanne; but it was proved that Ryanne had not been in the hotel since morning; at least, no one had seen him.

George gloomed about. A beastly day, all told; everything had gone wrong, and all because he had overslept. At dinner something was wrong with the soup; the fish was greasy; the roast was dry and stringy; the wine, full of pieces of cork. Out into the lounging-room again; and then the porter hurried over to him with a note from Ryanne. It stated briefly that it was vitally important for Mr. Jones to meet him at nine o'clock at the English-

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Bar in the Quarter Rosetti. Any driver would show him the way. Mahomed-El-Gebel, the guardian of the Holy Yhiordes, had turned up, and the band was beginning to play. Would Mr. Jones like a little fun by the wayside?

"I'm his man," said George. "But how the devil did this Mahomed ever get into my room?"

Had Fortune dined down-stairs instead of alone in her room, events might have turned out differently. Ryanne had really written to George, but not to Fortune.

Mahomed, fatalist that he was, had thrown everything upon the whirling scales of chance, and waited. Later, he may have congratulated himself upon his good luck. But it wasn't luck; it was the will of Allah that he, Mahomed, should contribute his slender share in working out the destinies of two young people.

George was in the proper mood for an adventure. He went so far as to admit to himself that he would have liked nothing better than a fisticuff. The one mistake he made in his calculations was dress. Men didn't generally go a-venturing in such finical attire. They wore bowlers and sack-coats

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and carried heavy walking-sticks. The only weapons George had were his two hands, now adorned with snug-fitting opera-gloves.

He saw Mrs. Chedsoye, spoke to her, inquired about Fortune, and was informed that she had dined in her room. A case of doldrums, Mrs. Chedsoye believed.

"I'm in a peck of trouble," said George, craving a little sympathy.

"In what way?"

"That rug I told you about is gone."

"What? Stolen?"

"Yes. Vanished into thin air."

"That's too bad. Of course, the police will eventually find it for you."

"I'm afraid that's exactly the trouble. I really daren't put the case in the hands of the police."

"Oh, I see." Mrs. Chedsoye looked profoundly sorry.

"And here I am, due for Port Said to-morrow."

"That's the kind that bowls you over," said the Major. "If there is anything I can do after you are gone . . ."

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"Oh, I shouldn't think of bothering you. Thanks, though."

"You must have lost your key," suggested Mrs. Chedsoye.

"No. It's been hanging up in the porter's bureau all day."

"Well, I hope you find the rug," said the Major, with a sly glance at his sister.

"Thanks. I must be off. The chap I bought it of says that the official guardian from Bagdad has arrived, and that there's likely to be some sport. I'm to meet him at a place called the English-Bar."

"The English-Bar?" The Major shook his head. "A low place, if I remember."

"And you are going dressed like that?" asked Mrs. Chedsoye.

"Haven't time to change." He excused himself and went in search of a carriage.

"The play begins, Kate," whispered the Major. "This Hoddy of ours is a wonderful chap."

"Poor fellow!"

"What; Hoddy?"

"No; Percival. He'll be very uncomfortable in patent-leather pumps."

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The Major laughed light-heartedly. "I suppose we might telegraph for reservation on the *Ludwig*."

"I shall pack at once. Fortune can find her way to Mentone from Naples. I am beginning to worry about that girl. She has a temper; and she is beginning to have some ideas."

"Marry her, marry her! How much longer must I preach that sermon? She's growing handsomer every day, too. Watch your laurels, Kate."

Mrs. Chedsoye inspected her rings.

Meanwhile, George directed his driver to go post-haste to the English-Bar. That he found it more or less of a dive in nowise alarmed him. He had been in places of more frightful aspect. As Ryanne had written him to make inquiries of the barmaid relative to finding him, he did so. She jerked her head toward the door at the rear. George went boldly to it, opened it, and stepped inside.

And vanished from the haunts of men.

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CHAPTER XII

THE CARAVAN IN THE DESERT

YES, George vanished from the haunts of men, as completely as if the Great Roc had dropped him into the Valley of Diamonds and left him there; and as nobody knows just where the Valley of Diamonds is, George was very well lost. Still, there was, at the end of a most unique experience, a recompense far beyond its value. But, of course, George, being without the gift of clairvoyance, saw nothing save the immediate and imminent circumstances: a door that banged behind him, portentously; a sack, a cloak, a burnouse, or whatever it was, flung about his head, and smelling evilly.

George hit out valiantly, and a merry scuffle ensued. The room was small; at least, George thought it was, for in the space of one minute he thumped

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against the four sides of it. He could see nothing and he couldn't breathe very well; but in spite of these inconveniences he put up three rounds that would have made some stir among the middleweights. In the phraseology of the fancy, he had a good punch. All the disappointments of the day seemed to become so many pounds of steam in his shoulder; and he was aware of a kind of barbaric joy whenever he hit some one. All the circumspection of years, all of the gentle blood of his peaceful forebears, gave way to the strain which still lurks in the blood of civilized humanity, even in the veins of poets and parsons. He fought with all the tactics of a sailor in a bar-room, not overnicely.

A table toppled over with a smashing noise. George and his assailants fell in a heap beside it. Thwack! Bang! George struggled to his feet and tugged at the stifling envelope. Some one jumped upon his back, Old Man of the Sea style. A savage elbow-jab disposed of this incubus. And then the racket began all over again. George never paused mentally to wonder what all this rumpus was about; time enough to make inquiries after the scrimmage. Intrepidly, as Hereward the Wake, as Bussy d'Am-

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bois, as Porthos in the cave of Loch-Maria, George fought. He wasn't a trained athlete; he hadn't any science; he was simply ordinarily tough and active and clean-lived; and the injustice of an unprovoked assault added to physical prowess a full measure of nervous energy. It was quasi-Homeric: a modern young gentleman in evening dress holding off for several minutes five sleek, sinewy, unhampered Arabs. But the days of the gods were no more; and no quick-witted goddess cast a veil across the eyes of the Arabs. No; George had to shift for himself. Suddenly there came a general rush from the center of the room into one of the right-angular corners. The subsequent snarl of legs and arms was not unlike that seen upon the foot-ball field. George was the man with the ball. And then to George came merciful darkness. The conjunction, as in astronomy, of two planets in the same degree of the Zodiac—meaning George's head and the stucco-wall—gave the Arabs complete mastery of the field of battle.

From the opposite side of the room came the voice of the referee: "Curses of Allah upon these

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white dogs! How they fight!" And Mahomed peered down into the corner.

One by one the Arabs got up, each examining his honorable wounds. George alone remained unmoved, quiet and disinterested, under the folds of the tattered burnouse.

"Is he dead?" demanded Mahomed.

"No, my father. His head hit the wall."

"Hasten, then. Bind his feet and hands and cover his eyes and mouth. We have but little time."

There was a long way yet to go, and Mahomed was too wise and cautious to congratulate himself at this early stage. George was thereupon trussed up like a Christmas fowl ready for the oven. They wrapped him up in the burnouse and carried him out to the closed carriage in waiting. No one in the street seemed curious. No one in the English-Bar deemed it necessary to be. Whatever happened in this resort had long been written in the book of fate. Had a white man approached to inquire what was going on, Mahomed would have gravely whispered that it was a case of plague they were hurry-

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ing away to prevent interference by the English authorities.

Once George was snug inside the carriage, it was driven off at a run toward the tombs of the caliphs. As the roads were not the levelest, the vehicle went most of the way upon two wheels. Mahomed sat beside his victim, watchful and attentive. His intention was to take him no farther than the outskirts of the city, force him to send back to the hotel a duly credited messenger for the rug, after which he would turn George adrift, with the reasonable assurance that the young man would find some one to guide him back to the hotel. After a while he observed that George had recovered and was grimly fighting the imprisoning ropes.

"You will need your strength," interposed Mahomed gently. "If I take the cloth from your mouth, will you promise not to cry out?" There was an affirmative nod, and Mahomed untied the bandage. "Listen. I mean you no harm. If you will send to the hotel for the Holy Yhiordes, you will be liberated the moment it is put into my hands."

"Go to the deuce!" snapped George, still dizzy.

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The fighting mood hadn't evaporated, by any means. "You know where it is better than I." So this was Mahomed?

"Fool!" cried the other, shaking George roughly.

"Easy there! I had the rug, but it was stolen this afternoon." He was very weak and tired. "And if I had it, I shouldn't give it to you," with renewed truculence; "and you may put that in your water-pipe and smoke it."

Mahomed, no longer pacific, struck George violently upon the mouth. He, on his part, was unknightly enough to attempt to sink his teeth in the brutal hand. Queer fancies flit through a man's head in times like this; for the ineffectuality of his bite reminded him of Hallowe'ens and the tubs with the bobbing apples. One thing was certain: he would kill this pagan the very first opportunity. Rather a startling metamorphosis in the character of a man whose life had been passed in the peacefulest environments. And to kill him without the least compunction, too. To strike a man who couldn't help himself!

"Hey there!" he yelled. "Help for a white man!" After such treatment he considered it anything but

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dishonorable to break his parole. And where was Ryanne? "Help!"

Mahomed swung his arm round George's neck, and the third cry began with a gurgle and ended with a sigh. Deftly, the Arab rebandaged the prisoner's mouth. So be it. He had had his chance for freedom; now he should drink to the bottom of the bitter cup, along with the others. He had had no real enmity against George; he was simply one of the pawns in the game he was playing. But now he saw that there was danger in liberating him. The other! Mahomed caressed his wiry beard. To subject him to the utmost mental agony; to break him physically, too; to pay him back pound for pence; to bruise, to hurt, to rack him, that was all Mahomed desired.

George made no further effort to free himself, nor apparently to bestir himself about the future. Somewhere in the fight, presumably as he fell against the table, he had received a crushing blow in the small ribs; and when Mahomed threw him back, he fainted for the second time in his life. He reclined limply in the corner of the carriage, the bosom of his shirt bulging open; for the thrifty

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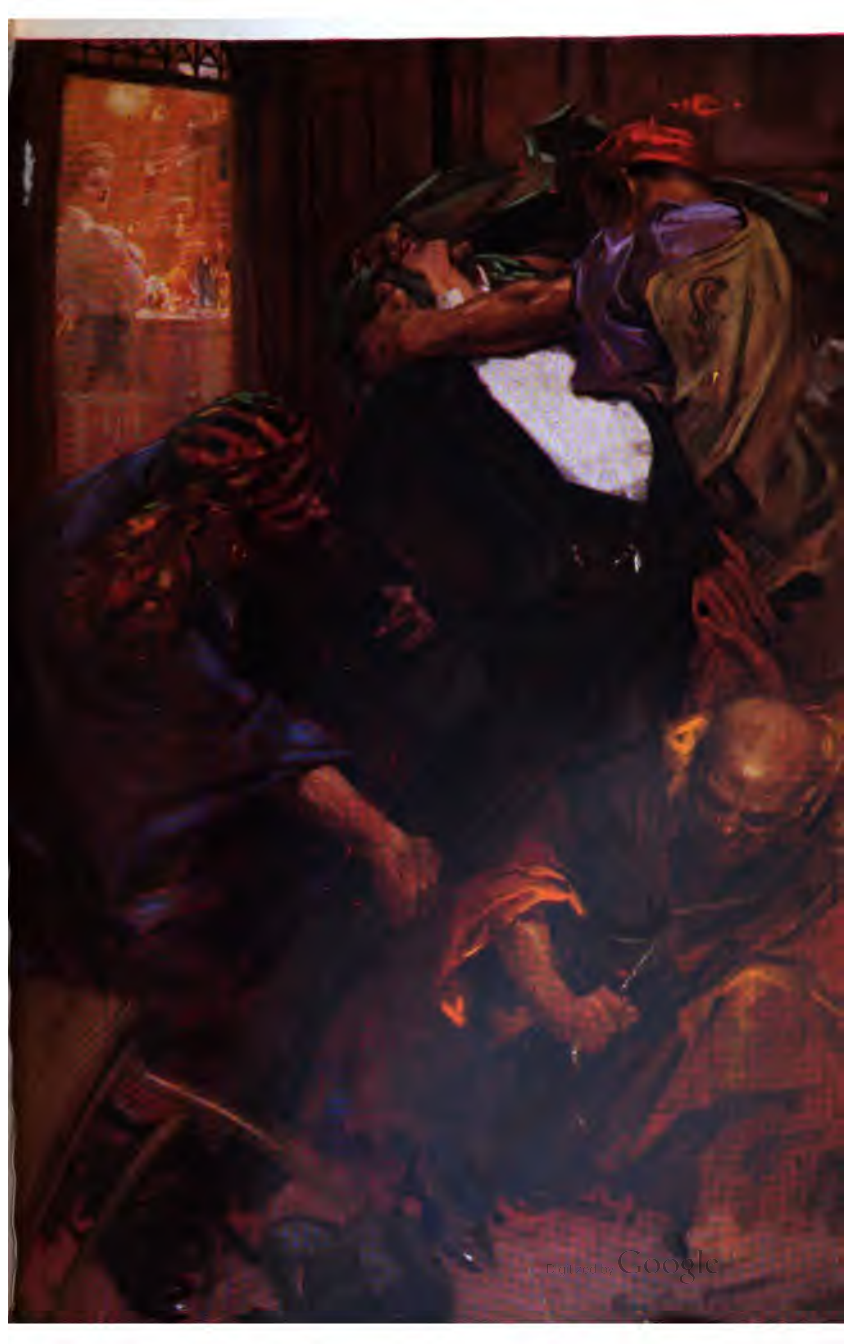
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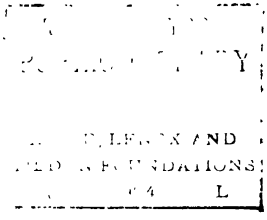

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Arabs had purloined the pearl-studs, the gold collar-buttons, and the sapphire cuff-links. And consciousness returned only when they lifted him out and dropped him inconsiderately into the thick dust of the road. He stirred again at his bonds, but presently lay still. The pain in his side hurt keenly, and he wasn't sure that the rib was whole. What time had passed since his entrance to the English-Bar was beyond his reckoning, but he knew that it was yet in the dark of night, as no light whatever penetrated the cloth over his eyes. That he was somewhere outside the city he was assured by the tang of the winter wind. He heard low voices—Arabic; and while he possessed a smattering of the tongue, his head ached too sharply for him to sense a word. Later, a camel coughed. Camels? And where were they taking him upon a camel? Bagdad? Impossible: there were too many white men following the known camel-ways. He groaned a little, but the sound did not reach the ears of his captors. To ride a camel under ordinary conditions was a painful affair; but to straddle the ungainly brute, dressed as he was, in a swallow-tail and paper-thin pumps, did not promote any pleasurable

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thoughts. They would in all truth kill him before they got through. Hang the rug! And doubly hang the man who had sold it to him!

His whilom friend, conscience, came back and gibbered at him. Once she had said: "Don't do it!" and now she was saying quite humanly: "I told you so!" Hadn't she warned him? Hadn't she swung her red lantern under his very nose? Well, she hoped he was satisfied. His reply to this brief jeremiad was that if ever he got his hands upon the rug again, he would hang on till the crack of doom, and conscience herself could go hang. Mere perverseness, probably. And where was it, since he was now certain that Mahomed had it not? It was Ryanne; Ryanne, smooth and plausible of tongue. Not being satisfied with a thousand pounds, he had stolen it again to mulct some other simple, trustful person. George, usually so unsuspicious, was now quite willing to believe anything of anybody.

He felt himself being lifted to his feet. The rope round his ankles was thrown off. His feet stung under the renewed flow of blood. He waited for them to liberate his hands, but the galling rope was not disturbed. It was evident that the natives still

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entertained some respect for his fighting ability. Next, they boosted him, flung a leg here and a leg there; then came a lurch forward, a lurch backward, the recurrence of the pain in his side, and he knew that he was upon the back of a camel, desert-bound. There were stirrups, and as life began to spread vigor once more through his legs, he found the steel. The straps were too short, and in time the upper turn of the steel chafed his insteps. He eased himself by riding sidewise, the proper way to ride a camel, but with constant straining to keep his balance without the use of his hands. Fortunately, they were not traveling very fast, otherwise, what with the stabbing pains in his side, produced by the unvarying dog-trot, he must have fallen. He was miserable, yet defiant; tears of anger and pain filled his eyes and burned down his cheeks in spite of the cloth.

And he, poor fool, had always been longing for an adventure, a taste of life outside the peaceful harbor wherein he had sailed his cat-boat! Well, here he was, in the deep-sea water; and he read himself so truly that he knew the adventure he had longed for had been the cut-and-dried affairs of

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story-tellers, in which only the villains were seriously discommoded, and everything ended happily. A dashing hero he was, to be sure! Why hadn't he changed his clothes? Was there ever such an ass? Ryanne had told him that there was likely to be sport; and yet he had left the hotel as one dressed for the opera. Ass! And to-morrow the *Ludwig* would sail without him.

The wind blew cold against his chest, and the fact that he could neither see, nor use his tongue to moisten his bruised lips, added to the discomforts. Back and forth he swayed and rocked. The pain in his side was gradually minimized by the torture bearing upon his ankles, his knees, across his shoulders. Finally, when in dull despair he was about to give up and slide off, indifferent whether the camels following trampled him or not, a halt was called. It steadied him. Some one reached up and untied the thong that strangled the life in his hands. Forward again. This was a trifle better. He could now ease himself with his hands. No one interfered with him when he tore off the bandages over his eyes and mouth. The camels were now urged to a swifter pace.

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Egyptian night, well called, he thought. He could discern nothing but phantom-like grey silhouettes that bobbed up and down after the fashion of corks upon water. Before him and behind him; how many camels made up the caravan he could not tell. He could hear the faint slip-slip as the beasts shuffled forward in the fine and heavy sand. They were well out into the desert, but what desert was as yet a mystery. He had forgotten to keep the points of the compass in his mind. And to pick out his bearings by any particular star was to him no more simple than translating Chinese.

Far, far away behind he saw a luminous pallor in the sky, the reflected lights of Cairo. And only a few hours ago he had complained to the head-waiter because of the bits of cork floating in his glass of wine. Ah, for the dregs of that bottle now; warmth, revival, new courage! . . . Curse the luck! There went one of his pumps. He called out. The man riding in front and leading George's camel merely gave a yank at the rope. The camel responded with a cough and a quickened gait.

Presently George became aware of a singular fact: that he could see out of one eye better than the

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other; and that the semi-useless orb shot out little stars with every beat of his heart. One of his ears, too, began to throb and burn. He felt of it. It was less like an ear than a mushroom. It had been a rattling good mix-up, anyhow; and he accepted the knowledge rather proudly that the George Percival Algernon, who but lately had entered the English-Bar sprucely and had made his exit in a kind of negligible attire, had left behind one character and brought away another. Never again was he going to be afraid of anything; never again was he going to be shy: the tame tiger, as it were, had had his first taste of blood.

Dawn, dawn; if only the horizon would brighten up a little so that he could get his bearings. By now they were at least fifteen or twenty miles from Cairo; but in what direction?

Hour after hour went by; over this huge grey roll of sand, down into that cup-like valley; soundless save when the camels protested or his stirrup clinked against a buckle; all with the somber aspect of a scene from Dante. Several black spots, moving in circles far above, once attracted George; and he knew them to be kites, which will follow a

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caravan into the desert even as a gull will follow a ship out to sea. Later, a torpid indifference took possession of him, and the sense of pain grew less under the encroaching numbness.

And when at last the splendor of the dawn upon the desert flashed like a sword-blade along the sky in the east, grew and widened, George comprehended one thing clearly, that they were in the Arabian desert, out of the main traveled paths, in the middle of nowhere.

His sense of beauty did not respond to the marvel of the transformation. The dark grey of the sand-hills that became violet at their bases, to fade away upward into little pinnacles of shimmering gold; the drab, formless, scattered boulders, now assuming clear-cut shapes, transfused with ruby and sapphire glowing; the sun itself that presently lifted its rosal warming circle above the stepping-off place—George saw but noted not. The physical picture was overshadowed by the one he drew in his mind: the good ship *Ludwig,* boring her way out into the sea.

The sun was free from the desert's rim when the leading camel was halted. A confusion ensued; the camels following stupidly into one another, in a

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kind of panic. Out of the silence came a babble of voices, a grunting, a clatter of pack-baskets and saddle-bags. George, as his camel kneeled, slid off involuntarily and tumbled against a small hillock, and lay there, without any distinct sense of what was going on round him. The sand, fine and mutable, formed a couch comfortingly under his aching body; and he fell asleep, exhausted. Already the impalpable dust, which had risen and followed the caravan all through the night, had powdered his clothes, and his face was stained and streaked. His head lay in the sand, his soft Fedora crushed under his shoulders. What with the bruises visible, the rents in his coat, the open shirt, soiled, crumpled, collarless, he invited pity; only none came from the busy Arabs. As he slept, a frown gathered upon his face and remained there.

When he came back from his troubled dreams, a bowl of rice, thinned by hot water, was given him. He cleaned the bowl, not because he was hungry, but because he knew that somewhere along this journey he would need strength; and the recurring fury against his duress caused him to fling the empty bowl at the head of the camel-boy who had

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brought it. The boy ducked, laughing. George lay down again. Let them cut his throat if they wanted to; it was all the same to him. Again he slept, and when he was roughly and forcibly awakened, he sat up with a snarl and looked about.

His head was clear now, and he began to take notes. He counted ten, eleven, twelve camels; a caravan in truth, prepared for a long and continuous journey. There were three pack-camels, laden with wood, tents, and such cooking utensils as the frugal Arab had need of. Certainly Mahomed was a rich man, whether he owned the camels or hired them for the occasion. Upon one of the beasts they were putting up a *mahmal,* a canopy used to protect women from the sun while riding. One Arab, taller, more robust than the others, moved hither and thither authoritatively. Wound about his *tarboosh* or fez was a bright green *cufia,* signifying that the wearer had made the pilgrimage to Holy Mecca. This individual George assumed to be Mahomed himself. And he recognized him as the beggar over whom he had stumbled two nights gone. Pity he hadn't known, and pitched him into the Nile when he had had the chance.

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Mahomed completed his directions, and walked leisurely toward George, but his attention was not directed toward him. A short distance away, at George's left, was a man, stretched out as if in slumber. Over his inert figure Mahomed watched. He drew back his foot and kicked the sleeping man soundly, smiling amiably the while; a kick which, had Mahomed's foot been cased in western leather, must have stove in the sleeper's ribs. Strange, the victim did not stir. Mahomed shrugged, and returned to the business of breaking camp.

George was keenly interested in this man who could accept such a kick apparently without feeling or resentment. He stood up for a better view. One glance was sufficient. It was Ryanne, the erstwhile affable Ryanne of the reversible cuffs: his feet and hands still in bondage, his clothes torn, his face battered and bruised like a sailor's of a Sunday morning on shore-leave. The sight of Ryanne brightened him considerably. Although he was singularly free from the spirit of malevolence, he was, nevertheless, human enough to subscribe to that unwritten and much denied creed that the misery of one man reconciles another to his. And

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here was company such as misery loved; here was a man worse off than himself, whose prospects were a thousand times blacker. Poor devil! And here he was, captive of the man he had wronged and beaten and robbed. As seen through George's eyes, Ryanne's outlook was not a pleasant thing to contemplate. But oh! the fight this one must have been! If it had taken five natives to overcome him, how many had it taken to beat Ryanne into such a shocking condition? He was genuinely sorry for Ryanne, but in his soul he was glad to see him. One white man could accomplish nothing in the face of these odds; but two white men, that was a different matter. Ryanne, once he got his legs, strong, courageous, resourceful, Ryanne would get them both out of it somehow. . . . And if Ryanne hadn't the rug, who the dickens had?

The jumble of questions that rose in his mind, seeking answers to the riddle of the Yhiordes rug, subsided even as they rose. The bundle to the far side of Ryanne stirred. He had, in his general survey of the scene, barely set a glance upon it, believing it to be a conglomeration of saddle-bags (made of wool and cotton) and blankets. It stirred

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again. George studied it with a peculiar sense of detachment. A woman; a woman in what had but recently been a smart Parisian tailor-made street-dress. The woman, rubbing her eyes, bore herself up painfully to a sitting posture. She was white. All the blows of the night past were as nothing in comparison with this invisible one which seemed to strike at the very source of life.

Fortune Chedsoye!

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CHAPTER XIII

NOT A CHEERFUL OUTLOOK

GEORGE, his brain in tumult, a fierce tigerish courage giving fictitious strength to his body, staggered toward her. It was a mad dream, a mirage of his own disordered thoughts. Fortune there? It was not believable. What place had she in this tangled web? He ran his fingers into his hair, gripped, and pulled. If it was a dream the pain did not waken him; Fortune sat there still. Through what terrors might she not have passed the preceding night? Alone in the desert, without any of those conveniences which are to women as necessary as the air they breathe! He tried to run, but his feet sank too deeply into the pale sand; he could only plod. He must touch her or hear her voice; otherwise he stood upon the brink of mad-

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ness. There was no doubt in his mind now; he loved her, loved her as deeply and passionately as any storied knight loved his lady; loved her without thought of reward, unselfishly, with great and tender pity, for unconsciously he saw that she, like he, was all alone, not only here in the desert, but along the highways where men set up their dwellings.

Mahomed, having an eye upon all things, though apparently seeing only that which was under his immediate concern, saw the young man's intention, and more, read the secret in his face. He was infinitely amused. There were two of them, so it seemed. Quietly he stepped in between George and the girl, and his movement freed George's mind of its bewilderment. Unhesitatingly, he flung himself upon the Arab, striving to reach the lean, brown throat. Mahomed, strong and unwearied, having no hand in the actual warfare, thrust George back so vigorously that the young man lost his balance and fell prone upon the sand. He was so weak that the fall stunned him. Mahomed stepped forward, doubtless with the generous impulse to prove that in the matter of kicks he desired to show no

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partiality, when a hand caught at his burnouse. He paused and looked down. It was the girl.

"Don't! A brave man would not do that."

Mahomed, moved by some feeling that eluded immediate analysis, turned about. It was time to be off, if he wished to reach Serapeum the following night. Pursuit he knew to be out of the question, since who was there to know that there was anything to pursue? But many miles intervened between here and his destination. He dared not enter Serapeum in the daytime. Lying upon the canal-bank as it did, the possibility of encountering a stray white man confronted him. Every camel-way frequented by Europeans must of necessity be avoided, every town of any size skirted, and all the while he must keep parallel with known paths or become lost himself. Not to become lost himself, that was his real concern. The caravan was provisioned for months, and he knew Asia-Minor as well as the lines upon his palms. There were sand-storms, too; but against these blighting visitations he would match his vigilant eye and the instinct of his camels. The one way in which these peculiar storms might distress him lay in the total obliteration of the way-

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signs, certain rocks, certain hills, without the guidance of which, like a good ship bereft of its compass, he might fall away from his course, notwithstanding that he would always travel toward the sun.

And there was also the vital question of water; he must never forget that; he must measure the time between each well, each oasis. So, then, aside from these dangers with which he felt able to cope, there was one unforeseen: the chance meeting with a wandering caravan headed by white men in search of rugs and carpets. These fools were eternally hunting about the wastes of the world; they were never satisfied unless they were prowling into countries where they had no business to be, were always breaking the laws of the caliphs and the Koran.

The girl was beautiful in her pale, foreign way; beautiful as the star of the morning, as the first rose of the Persian spring; and he sighed for the old days that were no more. She would have brought a sultan's ransom in the markets. But the accursed Feringhi were everywhere, and these sickly if handsome white women were more to them than their heart's blood; why, he had never ceased to

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wonder. But upon this knowledge he had mapped out his plan of torture in regard to Ryanne. The idea of selling Fortune had dimly formed in his mind, while his blood had burned in anger; but to-day's soberness showed him the futility of such a procedure. He would have to make the best of a foolish move; for the girl would eventually prove an encumbrance. At any rate, he would wring one white man's heart till it beat dry in his breast. That her health might be ruined, that she might sicken and die, in no manner aroused his pity. This attribute was destined never to be awakened in Mahomed's heart.

The *kisweh,* the *kisweh,* always the Holy Yhiordes; that he must have, even if he had to forego the pleasure of breaking Ryanne. He was too old to start life anew; at least, too old to stir ambition. He had wielded authority too many years to surrender it lightly; he had known too long his golden-flaked tobacco, his sherbet, his syrupy coffee, the pleasant loafing in the bazaars with his merchant friends. To return to the palace, to confess to the Pasha that his carelessness had lost him the rug, would result either in death or banishment; and so

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far as he was concerned he had no choice, the one was as bad as the other. So, if the young fool who had bought the rug of Ryanne told the truth when he declared that it had been stolen again, then Ryanne knew where it was; and he could be made to tell; he, Mahomed, would attend to that. And when Ryanne confessed, the girl and the other would be conveyed to the nearest telegraph-post. That they might at once report the abduction to the English authorities did not worry Mahomed. Not the fleetest racing-camel could find him, and behind the walls of the palace of Bagdad, only Allah could touch him. He had figured it all out closely; and he was an admirable strategist in his way. Revenge upon Ryanne for the dishonor and humiliation, and the return of the rug; there was nothing more beyond that.

Before George had the opportunity of speaking to Fortune, he was raised from the sand and bodily lifted upon his camel; and by way of passing pleasantry, his hat was jammed down over his eyes. He swore as he pulled up the brim. Swearing was another accomplishment added to the list of transformations. He had a deal to learn yet, but in his

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present mood he was likely to proceed famously. He readjusted the hat in time to see Ryanne unceremoniously dumped into one of the yawning pack-baskets, his arms and legs hanging out, his head lolling against his shoulder, exactly like a marionette, cast aside for the time being. A man of ordinary stamina would have died under such treatment. But Ryanne possessed an extraordinary constitution, against which years of periodical dissipation had as yet made no permanent inroads. Moreover, he never forgot to keep his chin up and his waist-line down. They put him into the pack-basket because there was no alternative, being as he was incapable of sitting upon a camel's back.

Next, George saw Fortune, unresisting, placed upon the camel, under canopy. At least, she would know a little comfort against the day's long ride. His heart ached to see her. He called out bravely to her to be of good cheer. She turned and smiled; and he saw only the smile, not the swift, decisive battle against the onset of tears: she smiled, and he was too far away to see the swimming eyes.

A bawling of voices, a snapping of the *kurbash* upon the flanks of the camels, and the caravan was

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once more under way. George looked at his watch, which fortunately had been overlooked by the thieving natives, and found it still ticking away briskly. It was after nine. It was a comfort to learn that the watch had not been injured. Most men are methodical in the matter of time, no matter how desultory they may be in other things. There is a peculiar restfulness in knowing what the hour is, whether it passes quickly or whether it drags.

Further investigation revealed that his letter of credit was undisturbed and that he was the proud possessor of six damaged cigars and a box of cigarettes. Instantly the thought of being days without tobacco smote him almost poignantly. He was an inveterate smoker, and the fact that the supply was so pitiably small gave unusual zest to his craving. He now longed for the tang of the weed upon his lips, but he held out manfully. He would not touch a cigar or cigarette till nightfall, and then he made up his mind to smoke half of either. The touch, selfish and calculating, of the miser stole over him. If Ryanne was without the soother, so much the worse for him. The six cigars he would not share

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with the Archangel Michael, supposing that gentleman came down for a smoke.

Forward, always forward, winding in and out of the valleys, trailing over the hills, never faster, never slower. Noon came, and the brilliance of afternoon dimmed and faded into the short twilight. Were they never going to stop? One hill more, and George, to his infinite delight, saw a cluster of date-palms ahead, a mile or so; and he knew that this was to be the haven for the ship of the desert. The caravan came to it under the dim light of the few stars that had not yet attained their refulgence. Under the palms were a few deserted mud-houses, huddled dejectedly together, like outcasts seeking the nearness rather than the companionship of their co-unfortunates. Men had dwelt here once upon a time, but the plague had doubtless counted them out, one by one. They made camp near the well, which still contained water.

Prayers. A wailing chanted forth toward Mecca. "God is great. There is no God but God."

George had witnessed prayers so often that he no longer gave attention to the muezzin calling at eventide from a minaret. But out here, in the blank

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wilderness, it caught him again, caught him as it had never done before. A shiver stirred the hair at the base of his neck. The lean bodies, one not distinguishable from the other now, kneeling, standing, sweeping the arms, touching the forehead upon the rug, for even the lowest camel-boy had his prayer-rug, ceaselessly intoning the set phrases— George felt shame grow in his heart. Was he as loyal to his God as these were to theirs?

A good fire was started, and the funereal aspect of the oasis became quick and cheerful. A little distance from the blaze, George saw Fortune bending over the inanimate Ryanne. She was bathing his face with a wet handkerchief. After a time Ryanne turned over and flung his arms limply across his face. It was the first sign of life he had exhibited since the start. Fortune gently pulled aside his arms and continued her tender mercies.

"Can I help?" asked George.

"You might rub his wrists," she answered.

It seemed odd to him that they should begin in such a matter-of-fact way. It would be only when they had fully adjusted themselves to the situation that questions would put forth for answers. He

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knelt down at the other side of Ryanne and massaged his wrists and arms. Once he paused, catching his breath.

"What is it?" she asked.

"A rib seems to bother me. It'll be all right to-morrow." He went on with his manipulations.

"Is he badly hurt?"

"I can't say."

His knowledge of anatomy was not wide; still, Ryanne's arms and legs worked satisfactorily. The trouble was either in his head or back of his ribs. He put his arm under Ryanne's shoulder and raised him. Ryanne mumbled some words. George bent down to catch them. "Hit 'em up in this half, boys; we've got them going. Hell! Get off my head, you farmer! . . . Two cards, please." His face puckered into what was intended for a smile. George laid him back gently. Foot-ball and poker: what had this man not known or seen in life? Some one came between the two men and the fire, casting a long shadow athwart them. George looked up and saw Mahomed standing close by. His arms were folded and his face grimly inscrutable.

"Have you any blankets?" asked George coolly.

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Mahomed gave an order. A blanket and two saddle-bags were thrown down beside the unconscious man. George made a pillow of the bags and laid the blanket over Ryanne.

"Why do you waste your time over him?" asked Mahomed curiously.

"I would not let a dog die this way," he retorted.

"He would have let you die," replied Mahomed, turning upon his heel.

George stared thoughtfully at his whilom accomplice. What did the old villain insinuate?

"Can I do anything to make you more comfortable?" speaking to Fortune.

"I'm all right. I was chilled a little while ago, but the fire has done away with that. Thank you."

"You must eat when they bring you food."

"I'll try to," smiling bravely.

To take her in his arms, then and there, to appease their hunger and his heart's!

Self-consciously, her hand stole to her hair. A color came into her cheeks. How frightful she must look! Neither hair-pin nor comb was left. She threw the strands across her shoulder and plucked the snarls and tangles apart, then braided the whole.

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He watched her, fascinated. He had never seen a woman do this before. It was almost a sacrilege for him to be so near her at such a moment. Afterward she drew her blanket over her shoulders.

"You've got lots of pluck."

"Have I?"

"Yes. You haven't asked a question yet."

"Would it help any?"

"No, I don't suppose it would. I've an idea that we're all on the way to the home of Haroun-al-Rashid."

"Bagdad," musingly.

"It's the rug. But I do not understand you in the picture."

"No more do I."

With a consideration that spoke well of his understanding, he did not speak to her again till food was passed. Later, when the full terror of the affair took hold of her, she would be dreadfully lonely and would need to see him near, to hear his voice. He forced some of the hot soup down Ryanne's throat, and was glad to note that he responded a little. After that he limped about the strange camp, but was careful to get in no one's way.

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Slyly he took note of this face and that, and his satisfaction grew as he counted the aftermath of the war. And it had taken five of them, and even then the result had been in doubt up to that moment when his head had gone bang against the stucco. He took a melancholy pride in his swollen ear and half-shut eye. He had always been doubtful regarding his courage; and now he knew that George Percival Algernon Jones was as good a name as Bayard.

The camel-boys (they are called boys all the way from ten years up to forty), having hobbled the beasts, were portioning each a small bundle of *tibbin* or chopped straw in addition to what they might find by grazing. Funny brutes, thought George, as he walked among the kneeling animals: to go five days without food or water, to travel continuously from twenty-five to eighty miles the day! Others were busy with the pack-baskets. A tent, presumably Mahomed's, was being erected upon a clayey piece of ground in between the palms. No one entered the huts, even out of curiosity; so George was certain that the desertion had been brought about by one plague or another. A smaller

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tent was put up later, and he was grateful at the sight of it. It meant a little privacy for the poor girl. Great God, how helpless he was, how helpless they all were!

An incessant chatter, occasionally interspersed with a laugh, went on. The Arab, unlike the East Indian, is not ordinarily surly; and these seemed to be good-natured enough. They eyed George without malice. The war of the night before had been all in a day's work, for which they had been liberally paid. While he had spent much time in the Orient and had ridden camels, a real caravan, prepared for weeks of travel, was a distinct novelty; and so he viewed all with interest, knowing perfectly well that within a few days he would look upon these activities with a dull, hopeless anger. He went back to the girl and sat down beside her.

"Have you any idea why you are here?"

"No; unless he saw me in the bazaars with Horace, and thought to torture him by bringing me along."

Horace! A chill that was not of the night ran over his shoulders. So she called the adventurer by his given name? And how might her presenee

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torture Ryanne? George felt weak in that bitter moment. Ay, how might not her presence torture *him* also? He had never, for the briefest space, thought of Ryanne and Fortune at the same time. She spoke, apathetically it was true, as if she had known him all her life. The wisest thing he could do was to bring Ryanne to a condition where he could explain some parts of the enigma and be of some use. Horace!

"I'm going to have another try at him," he said.

She nodded, but without any particular enthusiasm.

George worked over Ryanne for the better part of an hour, and finally the battered man moved. He made an effort to speak, but this time no sound issued from his lips. At the end of the hour he opened his eyes and smiled. It was more like the grin George had once seen upon the face of a boxer who had returned to the contest after having been floored half a dozen times.

"Can you hear me?" asked George.

Ryanne stared into his face. "Yes," thickly. "Where are we?"

"In the desert."

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"Which one?"

"Arabian."

Ryanne tried to sit up alone.

"Better not try to move. They banged you up at a great rate. Best thing you can do is to go to sleep. You'll be all right in the morning."

Ryanne sank back, and George bundled him up snugly. Poor devil!

"He'll pull himself together in the morning," he said to Fortune. "I did not know that you knew him well."

"I have known him for eight or nine years. He used to visit my uncle at our villa in Mentone." She smiled. "You look very odd."

"No odder than I feel," with an ineffectual attempt to bring together the ends of his collar-band. "I must be a sight. I was in too much of a hurry to get here. Did you eat the soup and fish?"

"The soup, yes; but I'm afraid that it will be some time before I can find the dried fish palatable. I hope my courage will not fail me," she added, the first sign of anxiety she had yet shown. She was very lonely, very tired, very sad.

It is quite possible that Mahomed, coming over,

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spoiled a pretty scene; for George had some very brave words upon the tip of his tongue.

"Come," said Mahomed to Fortune. "You will sleep in the little tent. No one will disturb you."

"Good night, Mr. Jones. Don't worry; I am not afraid."

George was alone. He produced one of his precious cigars and lighted it. Then he drew over his feet one of the empty saddle-bags, wrapped his blanket round him, and sat smoking and thinking till the heat of the fire, replenished from time to time, filled him with a comfortable drowsiness; and the cigar, still smoking, slipped from his nerveless fingers, as he lay back upon the hard clay and slept. Romance is the greatest thing in the world; but for all that, a man must eat and a man must sleep.

The cold dew of dawn was the tonic that recalled him from the land of grotesque dreams. He sat up and rubbed his face briskly with his hands, drying it upon the sleeve of his coat, as hasty and as satisfying a toilet as he had ever made. There was no activity in camp; evidently they were not going to start early. The cook alone was busy. The fire was crackling, the kettle was steaming, and

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a pot of pleasant-smelling coffee leaned rakishly against the hot ashes. The flap to Fortune's tent was still closed. And there was Ryanne, sitting with his knees drawn up under his chin, his hands clasped about his shins, and glowering at no visible thing.

"Hello!" cried George. "Found yourself, eh?"

Ryanne eyed him without emotion.

"When and how did they get you?" George inquired.

"About three hours before they got you. Something in a glass of wine. Dope. I'd have cleaned them up but for that."

"How do you feel?"

"Damned bad, Percival."

"Any bones broken?"

"No; I'm just knocked about; sore spot in my side; kicked, maybe. But it isn't that."

George didn't ask what "that" was. "Where do you think he's taking us?"

"Bagdad, if we don't die upon the way."

"I don't think he'll kill us. It wouldn't be worth his while."

"You did not give him the rug?"

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"Not I!"

"It comes hard, Jones, I know, but your giving it up will save us both many bad days. He asked you for it?"

"He did."

"Then why the devil didn't you give it to him? What's a thousand pounds against this muddle?"

"For the simple reason I didn't have it to give up."

"What's that?"

"When I went up to my room, night before last, some one had been there ahead of me. And at first I had given you the credit," said George, with admirable frankness.

"Gone!" There was no mistaking the dismay in Ryanne's voice.

"Absolutely."

"Well, I be damn!" Ryanne threw aside the blanket and got up. It was a painful moment, and he swayed a little. "If Mahomed hasn't it, and I haven't it, and you haven't it, who the devil has, then?"

George shook his head.

"Jones, we are in for it. If that cursed rug is

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Mahomed's salvation, it is no less ours. If we ever reach the palace of Bagdad and that rug is not forthcoming, we'll never see the outside of the walls again."

"Nonsense! There's an American consul at Bagdad."

"And Mahomed will notify him of our arrival!" bitterly.

"Isn't there some way we two might get at Mahomed?"

"Perhaps; but it will take time. Don't bank upon money. Mahomed wants his head. If the rug . . ." But Ryanne stopped. He looked beyond George, his face full of terror. George turned to see what had produced this effect. Fortune was coming out of her tent. "Fortune? My God!" Ryanne's legs gave under and he sank, his face in his hands. "I see it all now! Fool, fool! He's going to get me, Jones; he's going to get me through her!"

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CHAPTER XIV

MAHOMED OFFERS FREEDOM

FORTUNE had slept, but only after hours of watchful terror. The slightest sound outside the tent sent a scream into her throat, but she succeeded each time in stifling it. Once the evil laughter of a hyena came over the dead and silent sands, and she put her hands over her ears, shivering. Alone! She laid her head upon the wadded saddle-bags and wept silently, and every sob tore at her heart. She must keep up the farce of being brave when she knew that she wasn't. The men must not be discouraged. Her deportment would characterize theirs; any sign of weakness upon her side would correspondingly depress them the more. She prayed to God to give her the strength to hold out. She was afraid of Mahomed; she was afraid

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of his grim smile, afraid of his mocking eyes; she could not sponge out the scene wherein he had so gratuitously kicked Horace in the side. Horace! No, she did not believe that she would ever forgive him for this web which he had spun and fallen into himself. Two things she must hide for the sake of them all: her fear of Mahomed and her knowledge of Ryanne's trickery.

What part in this tragedy had the Arab assigned her? Her fingers twined and untwined, and she rocked and rocked, bit her lips, lay down, sat up and rocked again. But for the exhaustion, but for the insistent call of nature, she would never have closed her eyes that night.

And her mother! What would her mother believe, after the scene that had taken place between them? What could she believe, save that her daughter had fulfilled her threat, and run away? And upon this not unreasonable supposition her mother would make no attempt to find out what had become of her. Perhaps she would be glad, glad to be rid of her and her questions. Alone! Well, she had always been alone.

The only ray of sunshine in all was the presence

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of Jones. She felt, subtly, that he would not only stand between her and Mahomed, but also between her and Ryanne.

"Hush!" whispered George. "Don't let her see you like this. She mustn't know."

"You don't understand," replied Ryanne miserably.

"I believe I do." George's heart was heavy. This man was in love with her, too.

Ryanne struck the tears from his eyes and turned aside his head. He was sick in soul and body. To have walked blindly into a trap like this, of his own making, too! Fool! What had possessed him, usually so keen, to trust the copper-hided devil? All for the sake of one glass of wine! With an effort entailing no meager pain in his side, he stilled the strangling hiccoughs, swung round and tried to smile reassuringly at the girl.

"You are better?" she asked.

There was in the tone of that question an answer to all his dreams. One night's work had given him his ticket to the land of those weighed and found

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wanting. She knew; how much he did not care; enough to read his guilt.

It appeared to George that she was accepting the situation with a philosophy deeper than either his or Ryanne's. Not a whimper, not a plaint, not a protest so far had she made. She was a Roland in petticoats.

"Oh, I'm bashed up a bit," said Ryanne. "I'll get my legs in a day or so. Fortune, will you answer one question?"

"As many as you like."

"How did you get here?"

"Don't you know?"

George wasn't certain, but the girl's voice was cold and accusing.

"I?"

"Yes. Wasn't it the note that you wrote to me?"

Ryanne took his head in his hands, wearily. "I wrote you no note, Fortune; I have never written you a note of any kind. You do not know my handwriting from Adam's. In God's name, why didn't you ask your mother or your uncle? They

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would have recognized the forgery at once. Who gave it to you?"

"Mahomed himself."

"Damn him!" Ryanne grew strong under the passing fit of rage. "No, don't tell me to be silent. I don't care about myself. I'm the kind of a man who pulls through, generally. But this takes the spine out of me. I'm to blame; it's all my fault."

"Say no more about it." She believed him. She really hadn't thought him capable of such baseness, though at the time of her abduction she had been inclined to accuse him. That he was here, a prisoner like herself, was conclusive evidence, so far as she was concerned, of his innocence. But she knew him to be responsible for the presence of Jones; knew him to be culpable of treachery of the meanest order; knew him to be lacking in generosity and magnanimity toward a man who was practically his benefactor. "What does Mahomed want?"

"The bally rug, Fortune. And Jones here, who had it, says that it is gone."

"Vanished, magic-carpet-wise," supplemented George.

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"And Jones would have given it up."

"And a thousand like it, if we could have bought you out of this."

"Jones and I could have managed to get along."

"We shouldn't have mattered."

"And would you have returned to Mr. Jones his thousand pounds?"

"Yes, and everything else I have," quite honestly.

"Don't worry any more about the rug, then. I know where it is."

"You?" cried the two men.

"Yes. I stole it. I did so, thinking to avert this very hour; to save you from harm," to George, "and you from doing a contemptible thing," to Ryanne. "It is in my room, done up in the big steamer-roll. And now I am glad that I stole it."

Ryanne laughed weakly.

Said George soberly: "What contemptible thing?" He recollected Mahomed's words in regard to Ryanne as the latter lay insensible in the sand.

Ryanne, quick to seize the opportunity of solving, to his own advantage, the puzzle for George, and at the same time guiding Fortune away from a topic, the danger of which she knew nothing, raised

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a hand. "I bribed Mahomed to kidnap you, Jones. Don't be impatient. You laughed at me when I laid before you the prospectus of the United Romance and Adventure Company. I wished to prove to you that the concern existed. And so here is your adventure upon approval. I thought, of course, you still had the rug. Mahomed was to carry you into the desert for a week, and by that time you would have surrendered the rug, returned to Cairo, the hero of a full-fledged adventure. Lord! what a mess of it I've made. I forgot, next to his bally rug, Mahomed loved me."

The hitherto credulous George had of late begun to look into facts instead of dreams. He did not believe a word of this amazing confession, despite the additional testimony of Fortune, relative to Ryanne's statements made to her in the bazaars.

"The biter bitten," was George's sole comment.

Ryanne breathed easier.

"Why not tell Mahomed at once, and have him send a courier back for the rug?" suggested Fortune.

"By Jove, that clears up everything. We'll do it immediately." George felt better than he had at

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any stage of the adventure. Here was a simple way out of the difficulty.

"Softly," said Ryanne. "Let us come down to the lean facts. If that rug is in your room, Fortune, your mother has discovered it long before now. She will turn it over to your estimable uncle. None of us will ever see it again, I'm thinking. The Major knows that Jones gave me a thousand pounds for it." Struck by a sense of impending disaster, Ryanne began to fumble in his pockets. Gone! Every shilling of it gone! "He's got that, too; Mahomed; the cash you gave me, Jones. Wait a moment; don't speak; things are whirling about some. Over nine hundred pounds; every shilling of it. We mustn't let him know that I've missed it. I've got to play weak in order to grow strong . . . But they will at least start up a row as to your whereabouts, Fortune."

"No," thoughtfully; "no, I do not think they will."

The undercurrent was too deep for George. He couldn't see very clearly just then. The United Romance and Adventure Company; was that all? Was there not something sinister behind that name,

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concerning him? He looked patiently from the girl to the adventurer.

Ryanne stared at the yellow desert beyond. His brain was clearing rapidly under the stimulus of thought. He himself did not believe that they would send out search-parties either for him or for Fortune. He could not fathom what had given Fortune her belief; but he realized that his own was based upon the recollection of that savage mood when he had thrown down the gauntlet. Now they would accept it. He had run away with Fortune as he had boldly threatened to do. The mother and her precious brother would proceed at once to New York without him. He had made a fine muddle of it all. But for a glass of wine and a grain too much of confidence, he had not been here this day.

Mahomed, himself astir by this time, came over to the group, leisurely. The three looked like conspirators to his suspicious eye, but unlike conspirators they made no effort to separate because he approached. He understood: as yet they were not afraid of him. That was one of the reasons he hated white men; they could seldom be forced to show fear, even when they possessed it. Well,

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these three should know what fear was before they saw the last of him. He carried a *kurbash,* a cow-hide whip, which he twirled idly, even suggestively. First, he came to George.

"If you have the Yhiordes, there is still a chance for you. Cairo is but fifty miles away. Bagdad is several hundred." He drew the whip caressingly through his fingers.

"I do not lie," replied George, a truculent sparkle in his eyes. "I told you that I had it not. It was the truth."

A ripple of anxiety passed over Mahomed's face. "And you?" turning upon Ryanne, with suppressed savageness. How he longed to lay the lash upon the dog!

"Don't look at me," answered Ryanne waspishly. "If I had it I should not be here." Ah, for a bit of his old strength! He would have strangled Mahomed then and there. But the drug and the beating had weakened him terribly.

"If I give you the rug," interposed Fortune, "will you promise freedom to us all?"

Mahomed stepped back, nonplussed. He hadn't expected any information from this quarter.

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"I have the rug," declared Fortune calmly, though she could scarcely hear her own voice, her heart beat so furiously.

"You have it?" Mahomed was confused. Here was a turn in the road upon which he had set no calculation. All three of them!

"Yes. And upon condition that you liberate us all, I will put it into your hands. But it must be my writing this time."

A white man would have blushed under the reproach in her look. Mahomed smiled amiably, pleased over his cleverness. "Where is the *kisweh?*"

"The *kisweh?*"

"The Holy Yhiordes. Where is it?"

"That I refuse to tell you. Your word of honor first, to bind the bargain."

Ryanne laughed. It acted upon Mahomed like a goad. He raised the whip, and had Ryanne's gaze swerved the part of an inch, the blow would have fallen.

"You laugh?" snarled Mahomed.

"Why, yes. A bargain with your honor makes me laugh."

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"And *your* honor?" returned Mahomed fiercely. He wondered why he held his hand. "I have matched trickery against trickery. My honor has not been called. I fed you, I gave you drink; in return you lied to me, dishonored me in the eyes of my friends, and one of them you killed."

"It was my life or his," exclaimed Ryanne, not relishing the recital of this phase. "It was my life or his; and he was upon my back."

Fortune shuddered. Presently she laid her hand upon Mahomed's arm. "Would you take my word of honor?"

Mahomed sought her eyes. "Yes. I read truth in your eyes. Bring me the rug, and my word of honor to you, you shall go free."

"But my friends?"

"One of them." Mahomed laughed unpleasantly. It was an excellent idea. "One of them shall go free with you. It will be for you to choose which. Now, you dog, laugh, laugh!" and the tongue of the *kurbash* bit the dust within an inch of Ryanne's feet.

"What shall I do?" asked Fortune miserably.

"Accept," urged Ryanne. "If you are afraid to

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choose one or the other of us, Jones and I will spin a coin."

"I agree," said George, very unhappy.

"Have you any paper, Jones?"

George searched. He found the dance-card to the ball at the hotel. In another pocket he discovered the little pencil that went with it.

"You write," said Mahomed to Fortune.

"I intend to." Fortune took the card and pencil and wrote as follows:

"MOTHER:

"Horace, Mr. Jones and I are prisoners of the man who owned the rug, which you will find in the large steamer-roll. Give it to the courier who brings this card. And under no circumstances set spies upon his track." In French she added: "We are bound for Bagdad. In case Mahomed receives the rug and we are not liberated, wire the embassy at Constantinople and the consulate at Bagdad.

"FORTUNE."

She gave it to Mahomed.

"Read it out loud," he commanded. While he spoke English fluently, he could neither read nor write it in any serviceable degree. The note he had given to Fortune had been written by a friend of

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his in the bazaars who had upon a time lived in New York. Fortune read slowly, slightly flushing as she evaded the French script.

"That will do," Mahomed agreed.

He shouted for one of his boys, bade him saddle the *hagin* or racing-camel, which of all those twelve, alone was his, and be off to Cairo. The boy dipped his bowl into the kettle, ate greedily, saddled the camel, and five minutes later was speeding back toward Cairo at a gait that would bring him there late that night.

Fortune and George and Ryanne watched him till he disappeared below a dip and was gone from view. In the minds of the three watchers the same question rose: would he be too late? George was cheerful enough thereafter, but his cheerfulness was not of the infectious kind.

At noon the caravan was once more upon its way. Ryanne was able to ride. The fumes of whatever drug had been administered to him had finally evaporated, and he felt only bruised, old, disheartened. An evil day for him when he had set forth for Bagdad in quest of the rug. He was confident that there would be no rug awaiting the courier, and

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what would be Mahomed's procedure when the boy returned empty-handed was not difficult to imagine. Mahomed was right; so far honor had not entered into the contest. According to his lights, the Arab was only paying coin for coin. But for the girl, Ryanne would have accepted the situation with a shrug, to await that moment when Mahomed, eased by the sense of security, would naturally relax vigilance. The presence of Fortune changed the whole face of the affair. Mahomed could have his eyes and heart if he would but spare her. He must be patient; he must accept insults, even physical violence, but some day he and Mahomed would play the final round.

His past, his foolish, futile past: all the follies, all the petty crimes, all the low dissipations in which he had indulged, seemed trooping about his camel, mocking and gibbering at him. Why hadn't he lived clean like Jones there? Why hadn't he fought temptation as he had fought men? Environment was no excuse; bringing-up offered no palliation; he had gone wrong simply because his inclinations had been wrong. On the other hand, no one had ever tried to help him back to a decent living. His

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mother had died during his childhood, and her influence had left no impression. His father had been a money-maker, consumed by the pleasure of building up pyramids of gold. He had never reasoned with his youngest-born; he had paid his bills without protest or reproach; it was so much a month to be written down in the expense account. And the first-born had been his natural enemy since the days of the nursery. Still, he could not acquit himself; his own arraignment was as keen as any judge could have made. Strong as he was physically, brilliant as he was mentally, there was a mortal weakness in his blood; and search as he might the history of his ancestors, their lives shed no light upon his own.

In stating that his face had been granted that dubious honor and concern of the perpetrators of the rogues' gallery, he had merely given rein to a seizure of soul-bitterness. But there was truth enough in the statement that he had been short in his accounts many thousands at his father's bank; gambling debts; and in making no effort to replace the loss, he was soon found out by his brother, who seemed only too glad to dishonor him. He was given his choice: to sign over his million, due

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him a year later (for at this time the father was dead), or go to prison. The scandal of the affair had no weight with his brother; he wanted the younger out of the way. Like the hot-headed fool he was, he had signed away his inheritance, taken a paltry thousand and left America, facing imprisonment if he returned. That was the kind of a brother he had. Once he had burned his bridges, there came to him a dozen ways by which he could have extricated himself. But once a fool, always a fool!

Disinherited, outcast, living by his wits, ingenious enough; the finer senses callousing under the contact with his inferiors; a gambler, a hard drinker periodically; all in all, a fine portrait for any gallery given over to rogues. And he hadn't worried much over the moral problem confronting him, that the way of the transgressor is hard. It was only when love rent the veil of his fatuity that he saw himself as he really was.

Love! He gazed ahead at Fortune under the *mahmal*. That a guileless young girl as she was should enchain him! That the sight of her should always send a longing into his soul to go back and

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begin over! His jaws hardened. Why not? Why not try to recover some of the crumbs of the fine things he had thrown away? At least enough to permit him to go again among his fellows without constantly looking behind to note if he were followed? By the Lord Harry! once he was out of this web of his own weaving, he *would* live straight; he swore that every dollar hereafter put in his pocket should be an honest one. Fortune could never be his wife. He came to this fact without any roundabout or devious byways. In the first place, he knew that he had not touched her; she had only been friendly; and now even her friendship hung by a thread. All right. The love he bore her was going to be his salvation just the same; and at this moment he was deadly in earnest.

It was after nine when they were ferried across the two canals, the fresh-water and the salt, several miles below Serapeum. The three weary captives saw a great liner slip past slowly and majestically upon its way to the Far East. She radiated with light and cheer and comfort; and all could hear faintly the pulsations of her engines. So near and yet so far; a cup of water to Tantalus! At mid-

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night they made camp. There were no palms this time; simply a well in the center of a jumble of huge boulders. The tents were pitched to the southwest, for now the wind blew, biting from the land of northern snows; and a fire was a welcome thing. This was Arabia; Africa had been left behind. Here they awaited the return of the courier, who arrived two days later, dead tired. The persons to whom the card had been sent had sailed for Naples with the steamer *Ludwig*. Mahomed turned upon the three miserables.

"I have you three, then; and by the beard of the Prophet, you shall pay, you shall pay! You have robbed and beaten and dishonored me; and you shall pay!"

"Am I guilty of any wrong toward you?" faltered the girl. Her mother had gone. She had hoped against hope.

"No," cried Mahomed. He laughed. "You are free to return to Cairo . . . alone! Free to take your choice of these two men to accompany you. Free, free as the air. . . . Well, why do you hesitate?"

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CHAPTER XV

FORTUNE'S RIDDLE SOLVED

FORTUNE, without deigning to reply, walked slowly and proudly to her tent, and disappeared within. She looked neither at Ryanne nor at George. She knew that George, his soul filled with that unlucky quixotic sense of chivalry which had made him so easy a victim to her mother, would not accept his liberty at the price of Ryanne's, Ryanne, to whom he owed nothing, not even mercy. And if she had had to ask one of the two, George would have been the natural selection, for she trusted him implicitly. Perhaps there still lingered in her mind a recollection of how charmingly he had spoken of his mother.

She could have set out for Cairo alone: even as she could have grown a pair of wings and sailed

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through the air! The fate that walked behind her was malevolent, cruel, unjust. She had wronged no one, in thought or deed. She had put out her hand confidently to the world, to be laughed at, distrusted, or ignored. Was it possible that a little more than a month ago she wandered, if not happy, in the sense she desired, at least in a peaceful state of mind, among her camelias and roses at Mentone? Her world had been, in this short time, remolded, reconstructed; where once had bloomed a garden, now yawned a chasm: and the psychological earthquake had left her dizzy. That Mahomed, now wrought to a kind of Berserk rage, might begin reprisals at once, did not alarm her; indeed, her feeling was rather of dull, aching indifference. Nothing mattered now.

But Ryanne and George were keenly alive to the danger, and both agreed that Fortune must go no farther.

Ryanne, under his bitter raillery and seeming scorn for sacred things, possessed a latent magnanimity, and it now pushed up through the false layers. "Jones, it's my funeral. Go tell her. You two can find the way back to the canal, and once

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there you will have no trouble. Don't bother your head about me."

"But what will you do?"

"Take my medicine," grimly.

"Ryanne, you are offering the cowardly part to me!"

"You fool, it's the girl. What do you and I care about the rest of it? You're as brave as a lion. When you put up your fists the other night, you solved that puzzle for yourself. For God's sake, do it while I have the courage to let you! Don't you understand? I love that girl better than my heart's blood, and Mahomed can have it drop by drop. Go and go quickly! He will give you food and water."

"You go. She knows you better than me."

"But will she trust me as she will you? Percival, old top, Mahomed will never let me go till he's taken his pound of flesh. Fortune!" Ryanne called. "Fortune, we want you!"

She appeared at the flap of the tent.

"Jones here will go back with you. Go, both of you, before Mahomed changes his mind."

"Miss Chedsoye, he is wrong. He's the one to

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go. He was hurt worse than I was. Pride doesn't matter at a time like this. You two go," desperately.

Fortune shook her head. "All or none of us; all or none of us," she repeated.

And Mahomed, having witnessed and overheard the scene, laughed, a laughter identical to that which had struck the barmaid's ears sinisterly. He had not studied his white man without gathering some insight into his character. Neither of these men was a poltroon. And when he had made the offer, he knew that the conditions would erect a barrier over which none of them would pass voluntarily. So much for pride as the Christian dogs knew it. Pride is a fine buckler; none knew that better than Mahomed himself; but a wise man does not wear it at all times.

"What is it to be?" he demanded of Fortune.

"What shall I say to him?"

"Whatever you will." Ryanne was tired. He saw that argument would be of no use.

"All or none of us." And Fortune looked at Mahomed with all the pride of her race. "It is not because you wish me to be free; it is because you

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wish to see one of my companions made base in my eyes. I will not have it!"

"The will of Allah!" He could not repress the fire of admiration in his own eyes as they took in her beauty, the erect, slender figure, the scorn upon her face, and the fearlessness in her great, dark eyes. Such a woman might have graced the palace of the Great Caliph. He had had in mind many little cruelties to practice upon her, that he might see the men writhe, impotent and helpless to aid her. But in this tense and dramatic scene, a sense of shame took possession of him; his pagan heart softened; not from pity, but from that respect which one brave person gives free-handed to another.

Mahomed was not a bad man, neither was he a cruel one. He had been terribly wronged, and his eastern way had but one angle of vision: to avenge himself, believing that revenge alone could soothe his outraged pride and reëstablish his honor as he viewed it from within. Had the courier returned with the Holy Yhiordes, it is not impossible that he would have liberated them all. But now he dared not; he was not far enough away. To Bagdad, then, and as swiftly as the exigencies of desert

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travel would permit. One beacon of hope burned in his breast. The Pasha might be deposed, and in that case he could immediately dispose of his own goods and chattels and seek new pastures. It would come hard, doubly hard, since he never could regain the position he was to lose.

Nine hundred pounds English, and a comfortable fraction over; the yellow-haired dog would have nothing in the end for his pains. It would be what the Feringhi called a good joke.

A week passed. Christmas. And not one of them recalled the day. Perhaps it was because years had passed since that time when it meant anything to them. The old year went out a-lagging; neither did they take note of this. Having left behind civilization, customs and habits were forgotten.

Sometimes they rode all day and all night, sometimes but half a day, and again, when the water was sweet, they rested the day and night. Never a human being they saw, never a caravan met or crossed them. In this week, the secret marvels of the desert became theirs. They saw it gleam and waver and glitter under skies of brass, when the north wind let down and a breeze came over from

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the Persian Gulf. They saw it covered with the most amazing blues and greys and greens. They saw it under the rarest azure and a stately fleet of billowy clouds; under the dawn, under the set of sun, under the moon and the stars; and unfailingly the interminable reaches of sand and rock and scrubby bush, chameleon-like, readjusted its countenance to each change in the sky. George, who was a poet without the gift of expression, never ceased to find new charms; and nothing pleased his fancy more than to see the cloud-shadows scud away across the sands. Once, toward the latter end of day, Fortune cried out and pointed. Far away, palely yet distinctly, they saw an ocean liner. She stood out against the yellowing sky as a magic-lantern picture stands out upon the screen, and faded similarly. It was the one and only mirage they saw, or at least noticed.

Once another caravan, composed wholly of Arabs, passed. What hope the prisoners had was instantly snuffed out. Before the strangers came within hailing, Mahomed hustled his captives into his tent and swore he would kill either George or Ryanne if they spoke. He forgot Fortune, how-

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ever. As the caravan was passing she screamed. Instantly Mahomed clapped his hand roughly over her mouth. The sheik of the passing caravan looked keenly at the tent, smiled grimly and passed on. What was it to him that a white woman lay in yonder tent? His one emotion was of envy. After this the prisoners became apathetic.

Upon the seventh day, they witnessed the desert's terrifying anger. The air that had been cool, suddenly grew still and hot; the blue above began to fade, to assume a dusty, copperish color. The camels grew restless. Quickly there rose out of the horizon saffron clouds, approaching with incredible swiftness. Little whirlwinds of sand appeared here and there, rose and died as if for want of air. Mahomed veered the caravan toward a kind of bluff composed of sand and precipitous boulders. All the camels were made to kneel. The boys muffled up their mouths and noses, and Mahomed gave instructions to his captives. Fortune buried her head in her coat and nestled down beside her camel, while George and Ryanne used their handkerchiefs. George left his camel and sought Fortune's side, found her hand and held it tightly. He scarcely

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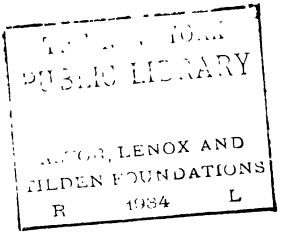
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gave thought to what he did. He vaguely meant to encourage her; and possibly he did.

The storm broke. The sun became obscured. Pebbles and splinters of rock sang through the pall of whirling sand. A golden tone enveloped the little gathering.

Had there been no natural protection, they must have ridden on, blindly and desperately, for to have remained still in the open would have been to await their tombs. It spent its fury in half an hour; and the clearing air became cold again. The caravan proceeded. The hair of every one was dimly yellow, their faces and their garments.

When camp was made that night it found the captives untalkative. The girl and the two men sat moodily about the fire. Fatigue had dulled their bodies and hopelessness their minds. The men were ragged now, unkempt; a stubble of beard covered their faces, gaunt yet burned. George had lost his remaining pump, and as his stockings were now full of holes, he had, in the last flicker of personal pride, wound about them some cast-off cloths he had found. There was not enough water for

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ablutions; there was scarcely enough to assuage thirst.

By and by, Ryanne, without turning his head, spoke to George. "You say you questioned the courier?"

"Yes."

"He says he showed the note to no one?"

"Yes."

"And so no one will try to find us?

"No."

Ryanne had asked these questions a dozen times and George had always given the same answers.

Up and away at dawn, for they must reach the well that night. It was a terrible day for them all. Even the beasts showed signs of distress. And the worst of it was, Mahomed was not quite sure of his route. Fortunately, they found the well. They drank like mad people.

Ryanne, who had discovered a pack of cards in his pocket, played patience upon a spot smoothed level with his hand. He became absorbed in the game; and the boys gathered round him curiously. Whenever he succeeded in turning out the fifty-two cards, he would smile and rub his hands to-

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gether. The boys at length considered him unbalanced mentally, and in consequence looked upon him as a near-holy man.

Between Fortune and George, conversation dwindled down to a query and an answer.

"Can I do anything for you?"

"No, thanks; I am getting along nicely."

To-night she retired early, and George joined Ryanne's audience.

"It averages about nine cards to the play," he commented.

Ryanne turned over an ace. Ten or fifteen minutes went by. In the several attempts he had failed to score the full complement.

George laughed.

"What's in your mind?" cried Ryanne peevishly. "If it's anything worth telling, shoot it out, shoot it out!"

"I was thinking what I'd do to a club-steak just about now."

Ryanne stared beyond the fire. "A club-steak. Grilled mushrooms."

"Sauce Bordelaise. Artichokes."

"No. Asparagus, vinaigrette."

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"What's the matter with endives?"

"That's so. Well, asparagus with butter-sauce."

"Grilled sweets, coffee, Benedictine, and cigars."

"And a magnum of '1900' to start off with!" Ryanne, with a sudden change of mood, scooped up the cards and flung them at George's head. "Do you want us both to become gibbering idiots?"

George ducked. He and the boys gathered in the fluttering paste-boards.

"You're right, Percival," Ryanne admitted humbly. "It will not hurt us to talk out loud, and we are all brooding too much. I am crazy for the want of tobacco. I'd trade the best dinner ever cooked for a decent cigar."

George put a hand reluctantly into his pocket. He brought forth, with extreme gentleness, a cigar, the wrapper of which was broken in many places. "I've saved this for days," he said. With his penknife he sawed it delicately into two equal parts, and gave one to Ryanne.

"You're a good fellow, Jones, and I've turned you a shabby trick. I shan't forget this bit of tobacco."

"It's the last we've got. The boys, you know, refuse a pull at the water-pipe; defiles 'em, they say.

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Funny beggars! And if they gave us tobacco, we shouldn't have paper or pipes."

"I always carry a pipe, but I lost it in the shuffle. I never looked upon smoking as a bad habit. I suppose it's because I was never caught before without it. And it *is* a bad habit, since it knocks up a chap this way for the lack of it. Where do you get your club-steaks in old N. Y.?"

And for an hour or more they solemnly discussed the cooking here and there upon the face of the globe.

By judicious inquiries, George ascertained that the trip to Bagdad, barring accidents, would take fully thirty-five days. The daily journeys proceeded uneventfully. Mahomed maintained a taciturn grimness. If he aimed at Ryanne at all, it was in trifling annoyances, such as forgetting to give him his rations unless he asked for them, or walking over the cards spread out upon the sand. Ryanne carried himself very well. Had he been alone, he would have broken loose against Mahomed; but he thought of the others, and restrained himself—some consideration was due them.

But into the blood of the two men there crept a

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petty irritability. They answered one another sharply, and often did not speak. Fortune alone seemed mild and gentle. Mahomed, since that night she had braved him, let her go and come as she pleased, nor once disturbed her. Had she shown weakness when most she needed courage, Mahomed might not have altered his plans. Admiration of courage is inherent in all peoples. So, without appreciating it, that moment had been a precious one, saving them all much unpleasantness.

By the twentieth day, the caravan was far into the Arabian desert, and early in the afternoon, they came upon a beautiful oasis, nestling like an emerald in a plaque of gold. So many days had passed since the beloved green of growing things had soothed their inflamed eyes, that the sight of this haven cheered them all mightily. Once under the shade of the palms, the trio picked up heart. Fortune sang a little, George told a funny story, and Ryanne wanted to know if they wouldn't take a hand at euchre. Indeed, that oasis was the turning-point of the crisis. Another week upon the dreary, profitless sands, and their spirits would have gone under completely.

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This oasis was close to the regular camel-way, there being a larger oasis some twenty-odd miles to the north. But Mahomed felt safe at this distance, and decided to freshen up the caravan by a two-days' rest.

George immediately began to show Fortune little attentions. He fixed her saddle-bags, spread out her blanket, brought her some ripe dates of his own picking, insisted upon going to the well and drawing the water she was to drink. And oh! how sweet and cool that water was, after the gritty flat liquid they had been drinking! Just before sundown, he and Fortune set out upon a voyage of discovery; and Ryanne paused in his game of patience to watch them. There was more self-abnegation than bitterness in his eyes. Why not? If Fortune returned to her mother, sooner or later the thunderbolt would fall. Far better that she should fall in love with Jones than to go back to the overhanging shadow. A smile lifted the corners of his lips, a sad smile. Percival didn't look the part of a hero. His coat was variously split under the arms and across the shoulders; his trousers were ragged, and he walked in his cloth pads like a man

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who had gout in both feet. A beard covered his face, and the bare spots were blistered and peeling. But there was youth in Percival's eyes and youth in his heart, and surely the youth in hers must some day respond. She would know this young man; she would know that adversity could not crush him; that the promise of safety could not make a coward of him; that he was loyal and brave and honest. She would know in twenty days what it takes the average woman twenty years to learn, the manner of man who professed to love her. Ryanne left the game unfinished, stretched himself upon the ground with his face hidden in the crook of his arms. Oh, the bitter cup, the bitter cup!

Round the fire that night, the camel-boys got out their tom-toms and reeds, and the eerie music affected the white people hauntingly and mysteriously. For thousands of years, the high and low notes of the drums (hollow earthen-jars or large gourds covered with goat-skin at one end) and the thin, metallic wail of the reeds had echoed across the deserts, unchanged. The boys swayed to and fro to the rhythm, gradually working themselves into an ecstatic frenzy.

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Fortune always remembered that night. Wrapped in her blanket, she had lain down just outside the circle, and had fallen into a doze. When the music stopped and the boys left the prisoners to themselves, George and Ryanne talked.

"I never forget faces," began George.

"No? That's a gift."

"And I have never forgotten yours. I was in doubt at first, but not now."

"I never met you till that night at the hotel."

"That's true. But you are Horace Wadsworth, all the same, the son of the millionaire-banker, the man I used to admire in the field."

"You still think I'm that chap?"

"I am sure of it. The first morning you gave yourself away."

"What did I say?" anxiously.

"You mumbled foot-ball phrases."

"Ah!" Ryanne was vastly relieved. He seemed to be thinking.

"Do you persist in denying it?"

"I might deny it, but I shan't. I'm Horace Wadsworth, all right. Fortune knows something about that chapter, but not all. Strikes you odd,

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eh?" continued Ryanne, iron in his voice. "Every opportunity in the world; and yet, here I am. How much do you know, I wonder?"

"You took some money from the bank, I think they said."

"Right-O! Wine, Percival; cards, wine and other things. Advice and warning went into one ear and out of the other. Always so, eh? You have heard of my brother, I dare say. Well, he wouldn't lend me two stamps were I to write for the undertaker to come and collect my remains. Beautiful history! I've been doing some tall thinking these lonely nights. Only the straight and narrow way pays. Be good, even if you are lonesome. When I get back, if I ever do, it's a new leaf for mine. Neither wine nor cards nor women."

Silence. The fire no longer blazed; it glowed.

"Who is Mrs. Chedsoye?" George finally began anew.

"First, how did you chance to make her acquaintance?"

"Some years ago, at Monte Carlo."

"And she borrowed a hundred and fifty pounds of you."

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"Who told you that?" quickly.

"She did. She paid you back."

"Yes."

"And she hadn't intended to. You poor innocent!"

"Why do you call me that?"

"To lend money at Monte Carlo to a woman whose name you did not know at the time! Green, green as a paddy field! I'll tell you who she is, because you're bound to learn sooner or later. She is one of the most adroit smugglers of the age; jewels and rare laces. And never once has the secret-service been able to touch her. Her brother, the Major, assists her when he isn't fleecing tender lambs at all known games of chance. He's a card-sharp, one of the best of them. He tried to teach me, but I never could cheat a man at cards. Never makes any false moves, but waits for the quarry to offer itself. That poor child has always been wondering and wondering, but she never succeeded in finding out the truth. Brother and sister have made a handsome living, and many a time I have helped them out. There; you have me in the ring, too. But who cares? The father, so I understand,

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married Fortune's mother for love; she married him for his money, and he hadn't any. Drink and despair despatched him quickly enough. She is a remarkable woman, and if she had a heart, she would be the greatest of them all. She has as much heart as this beetle," as he filliped the green iridescent shell into the fire. "But, after all, she's lucky. It's a bad thing to have a heart, Percival, a bad thing. Some one is sure to come along and wring it, to jab it and stab it."

"The poor little girl!"

"Percival, I'm no fool. I've been watching you. Go in and win her; and God bless you both. She's not for me, she's not for me!"

"But what place have I in all this?" evasively.

"What do you mean by that?"

"Why did Mrs. Chedsoye pay me back, when her original intention had been not to pay me?"

"You'll find all that written in the book of fate, as Mahomed would say. More, I can not tell you."

"Will not?"

"Well, that phrase expresses it."

They both heard the sound. Fortune, her face white and drawn, stood immediately behind them.

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CHAPTER XVI

MAHOMED RIDES ALONE

IT WAS as if the stillness of the desert itself had encompassed the two men. In their ears the slither of the brittle palm-leaves against one another and the crackle of the fire were no longer sounds. They stared at Fortune with that speechless wonder of men who had come unexpectedly upon a wraith. What with the faint glow of the fire upon one side of her and the pallor of moonshine upon the other, she did indeed resemble man's conception of the spiritual.

Ryanne was first to pull himself together.

"Fortune, I am sorry; God knows I am. I'd have cut out my tongue rather than have hurt you. I thought you were asleep in the tent."

"Is it true?"

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"Yes." Ryanne looked away.

"I had not quite expected this: the daughter of a thief."

"Oh, come now; don't look at it that way. Smuggling is altogether a different thing," protested Ryanne. (Women were uncertain; here she was, apparently the least agitated of the three.) "Why, hundreds of men and women, who regularly go to church, think nothing of beating Uncle Sam out of a few dollars. Here's Jones, for instance; he would have tried to smuggle in that rug. Isn't that right, Jones?"

"Of course!" cried George eagerly, though scarcely knowing what he said. "I'd have done it."

"And you wouldn't call Percival a thief," with a forced laugh. "It's like this, Fortune. Uncle Sam wants altogether too much rake-off. He doesn't give us a square deal; and so we even up the matter by trying to beat him. Scruples? Rot!"

"It is stealing," with quiet conviction.

"It isn't, either. Listen to me. Suppose I purchase a pearl necklace in Rome, and pay five-

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thousand for it. Uncle Sam will boost up the value more than one-half. And what for? To protect infant industries? Bally rot! We don't make pearls in the States; our oysters aren't educated up to it." His flippancy found no response in her. "Well, suppose I get that necklace through the customs without paying the duty. I make twenty-five hundred or so. And nobody is hurt. That's all your mother does."

"It is stealing," she reiterated.

How wan she looked! thought George.

"How can you make that stealing?" Ryanne was provoked.

"The law puts a duty upon such things; if you do not pay it, you steal. Oh, Horace, don't waste your time in specious arguments." She made a gesture, weariness personified. "It is stealing; all the arguments in the world can not change it into anything else. And how about my uncle who fleeces the lambs at cards, and how about my mother who knows and permits it?"

Ryanne had no plausible argument to offer against these queries.

"Is not my uncle a thief, and is not my mother

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an abettor? I do not know of anything so vile." Her figure grew less erect. To George's eyes, dimmed by the reflecting misery in hers, she drooped, as a flower exposed to sudden cold. "I think the thief in the night much honester than one who cheats at cards. A card-sharp; did you not call it that? Don't lie, Horace; it will only make me sad."

"I shan't lie any more, Fortune. All that you believe is true; and I would to God that it were otherwise. And I've been a partner in many of their exploits. But not at cards, Fortune; not at cards. I'm not that kind of a cheat."

"Thank you. I should have known some time, and perhaps only half a truth. Now I know all there is to know." She held her hands out before her and studied them. "I shall never go back."

"Good Lord! Fortune, you must. You'd be as helpless as a babe. What could you do without money and comfort?"

"I can become a clerk in a shop. It will be honest. Bread at Mentone would choke me;" and she choked a little then as she spoke.

"My dear Fortune," said Ryanne, calling into

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life that persuasive sweetness which upon occasions he could put into his tones, "have you ever thought how beautiful you are? No, I don't believe you have. Some ancestor of your father's has been reincarnated in you. You are without vanity and dishonesty; and I have found that these usually go together. Well, at Mentone you had a little experience with men. You were under protection then; protection it was of a sort. If you go out into the world alone, there will be no protection; and you will find that men are wolves generally, and that the sport of the chase is a woman. Must I make it plainer?"

"I understand," her chin once more resolute. "I shall become a clerk in a shop. Perhaps I can teach, or become a nurse. Whatever I do, I shall never go back to Mentone. And all men are not bad. You're not all bad yourself, Horace; and so far as I am concerned, I believe I might trust you anywhere."

"And God knows you could!" genuinely. "But I can't help you. If I had a sister or a woman relative, I could send you to her. But I have no one but my brother, and he's a worse scoundrel

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than I am. I at least work out in the open. He transacts his villainies behind closed doors."

George listened, sitting as motionless as a Buddhist idol. Why couldn't *he* think of something? Why couldn't *he* come to the aid of the woman he loved in this her hour of trial? A fine lover, forsooth! To sit there like a yokel, stupidly! Could he offer to lend her money? A thousand times, no! And he could not ask her to marry him; it would not have been fair to either. She would have misunderstood; she would have seen not love but pity, and refused him. Neither she nor Ryanne suffered more in spirit than he did at that moment.

"Jones, for God's sake, wake up and suggest something! You know lots of decent people. Can't you think of some one?"

But for this call George might have continued to grope in darkness. Instantly he saw a way. He jumped to his feet and seized her by the hands, boyishly.

"Fortune, Ryanne is right. I've found a way. Mr. Mortimer, the president of my firm, is an old man, kindly and lovable. He and his wife are

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childless. They'll take you. Why, it's as easy as talking."

She leaned back against the drawing of his hands. She was afraid that in his eagerness he was going to take her in his arms. She wondered why, of a sudden, she had become so weak. Slowly she withdrew her hands from his.

"I'll cable the moment we reach port," he said, as if reaching port under the existing conditions was a thing quite possible. "Will you go to them? Why, they will give you every care in the world. And they will love you as . . . as you ought to be loved!"

Ryanne turned away his head.

Fortune was too deeply absorbed by her misery to note how near George had come to committing himself. "Thank you, Mr. Jones; thank you. I am going to the tent. I am tired. And I am not so brave as you think I am."

"But will you?"

"I shall tell you when we reach port." And with that she fled to the tent.

Ryanne folded his arms and stared at the sand. George sat down and aimlessly hunted for the

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stub of the cigar he had dropped; a kind of reflex action.

The two men were all alone. The camel-boys were asleep. Mahomed had now ceased to bother about a guard.

"I can't see where she gets this ridiculous sense of honesty," said Ryanne gloomily.

George leaned over and laid his hand upon Ryanne's knee. "She gets it the same way I do, Ryanne—from here," touching his heart; "and she is right."

"I believe I've missed everything worth while, Percival. Till I met you I always had a sneaking idea that money made a man evil. The boot seems to be upon the other foot."

"Ryanne, you spoke about becoming honest, once you get out of this. Did you mean it?"

"I did, and still do."

"It may be that I can give you a lift. You worked in your father's bank. You know something about figures. I own two large fruit-farms in California. What do you say to a hundred and fifty a month to start with, and begin life over again?"

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Ryanne got up and restlessly paced. Nonchalance had been beaten out of him; the mercurial humor which had once been so pleasant to excite, which had once given him foothold in such moments, was gone. He had only one feeling, a keen, biting, bitter shame. At length he stopped in front of George, who smiled and looked up expectantly.

"Jones, when you stick your finger into water and withdraw it, what happens? Nothing. Well, the man who gives me a benefit is sticking his finger into water. I'm just as unstable. How many promises have I made and broken! I mean, promises to myself. I don't know. This moment I swear to be good, and along comes a pack of cards or a bottle of wine, and back I slip. Would it be worth while to trust a man so damned weak as that? Look at me. I am six-foot two, normally a hundred and eighty pounds, no fat. I am as sound as a cocoanut. There isn't a boxer in the States I'm afraid of. I can ride, shoot, fence, fight; there isn't a game I can't take a creditable hand in. So much for that. There's the other side. Morally, I'm putty. When it's soft you can

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mold it any which way; when it's hard, it crumbles. Will you trust a man like that?"

"Yes. Out there you'll be away from temptation."

"Perhaps. Well, I accept. And if one day I'm missing, think kindly of the poor devil of an outcast who wanted to be good and couldn't be. I'm fagged. I'm going to turn in. Good night."

He picked up his blanket and saddle-bags and made his bed a dozen yards away.

George set his gaze at the fire, now falling in places and showing incandescent holes. A month ago, in the rut of commonplace, moving round in the oiled grooves of mediocrity. Bang! like a rocket. Why, never had those liars in the smoke-rooms recounted anything half so wild and strange as this adventure. Smugglers, card-sharps, an ancient rug, a caravan in the desert! He turned his head and looked long and earnestly at the little tent. Love, too; love that had put into his diffident heart the thrill and courage of a Bayard. Love! He saw her again as she stepped down from the carriage; in the dining-room at his side, leaning over the parapet; ineffably sweet, haunt-

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ingly sad. Would she accept the refuge he had offered? He knew that old Mortimer would take her without question. Would she accept the shelter of that kindly roof? She must! If she refused and went her own way into the world, he would lose her for ever. She must accept! He would plead with all the eloquence of his soul, for his own happiness, and mayhap hers. He rose, faced the tent, and, with a gesture not unlike that of the pagan in prayer, registered a vow that never should she want for protection, never should she want for the comforts of life. How he was going to keep such a vow was a question that did not enter his head. Somehow he was going to accomplish the feat.

What mattered the ragged beard upon his face, the ragged clothes upon his body, the tattered cloths upon his feet, the grotesque attitude and ensemble? The Lord of Life saw into his heart and understood. And who might say with what joy Pandora gazed upon this her work, knowing as she did what still remained within her casket?

From these heights, good occasionally for any man's soul, George came down abruptly and

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humanly to the prosaic question of where would he make his bed that night? To lie down at the north side of the fire meant a chill in the morning; the south side, the intermittent, acrid breath of the fire itself; so he threw down his blanket and bags east of the fire, wrapped himself up, and sank into slumber, light but dreamless.

What was that? He sat up, alert, straining his ears. How long had he been asleep? An hour by his watch. What had awakened him? Not a sound anywhere, yet something had startled him out of his sleep. He glanced over the camp. That bundle was Ryanne. He waited. Not a movement there. No sign of life among the camel-boys; and the flaps of the two tents were closed. Bah! Nerves, probably; and he would have lain down again had his gaze not roved out toward the desert. Something moved out there, upon the misty, moonlit space. He shaded his eyes from the fire, now but a heap of glowing embers. He got up, and shiver after shiver wrinkled his spine. Oh, no; it could not be a dream; he was awake. It was a living thing, that long, bobbing camel-train, coming directly toward the oasis, no doubt

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attracted by the firelight. Fascinated, incapable of movement, he watched the approach. Three white dots; and these grew and grew and at length became . . . pith-helmets! Pith-helmets! Who but white men wore pith-helmets in the desert? White men! The temporary paralysis left him. Crouching, he ran over to Ryanne and shook him.

"What . . . "

But George smothered the question with his hand. "Hush! For God's sake, make no noise! Get up and stand guard over Fortune's tent. There's a caravan outside, and I'm going out to meet it. Ryanne, Ryanne, there's a white man out there!"

George ran as fast as he could toward the incoming caravan. He met it two or three hundred yards away. The broken line of camels bobbed up and down oddly.

"Are you white men?" he called.

"Yes," said a deep, resonant voice. "And stop where you are; there's no hurry."

"Thank God!" cried George, at the verge of a breakdown.

"What the devil . . . Flanagan, here's a

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white man in a dress-suit! God save us!" The speaker laughed.

"Yes, a white man; and there's a white woman in the camp back there, a white woman! Great God, don't you understand? A white woman!" George clutched the man by the foot desperately. "A white woman!"

The man kicked George's hand away and slashed at his camel. "Flanagan, and you, Williams, get your guns in shape. This doesn't look good to me, twenty miles from the main *gamelieh*. I told you it was odd, that fire. Lively, now!"

George ran after them, staggering. Twice he fell headlong. But he laughed as he got up; and it wasn't exactly human laughter, either. When he reached camp he saw Mahomed and the three strangers, the latter with their rifles held menacingly. Fortune stood before the flap of her tent, bewildered at the turn in their affairs. Behind the leader of the new-comers was Ryanne, and he was talking rapidly.

"Well," the leader demanded of Mahomed, "what have you to say for yourself?"

"Nothing!"

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"Take care! It wouldn't come hard to put a bullet into your ugly hide. You can't abduct white women these days, you beggar! Well, what have you to say?"

Mahomed folded his arms; his expression was calm and unafraid. But down in his heart the fires of hell were raging. If only he had brought his rifle from the tent; even a knife; and one mad moment if he died for it! And he had been gentle to the girl; he had withheld the lash from the men; he had not put into action a single plan arranged for their misery and humiliation! Truly his blood had turned to water, and he was worthy of death. The white man, always and ever the white man won in the end. To have come this far, and then to be cheated out of his revenge by chance! *Kismet!* There was but one thing left for him to do, and he did it. He spoke hurriedly to his head-boy. The boy without hesitation obeyed him. He ran to the racing-camel, applied a kick, flung on the saddle-bags, stuffed dates and dried fish and two water-bottles into them, and waited. Mahomed walked over to the animal and mounted.

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"Stop!" The white man leveled his rifle. "Get down from there!"

Mahomed, as if he had not heard, kicked the camel with his heels. The beast lurched to its feet resentfully. Mahomed picked up the guiding-rope which served as a bridle, and struck the camel across the neck.

Click! went the hammer of the rifle, and Mahomed was at that moment very near death. He gave no heed.

"No, no!" cried Fortune, pushing up the barrel. "Let him go. He was kind to me, after his fashion."

Mahomed smiled. He had expected this, and that was why he had gone about the business unconcernedly.

"What do you say?" demanded the stranger of Ryanne.

Ryanne, having no love whatever for Mahomed, shrugged.

"Humph! And you?" to George.

"Oh, let him go."

"All right. Two to one. Off with you, then," to Mahomed. "But wait! What about these

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beggars of yours? What are you going to do with them?"

"They have been paid. They can go back."

The moment the camel felt the sand under his pads, he struck his gait eastward. And when the mists and shadows crept in behind him and his rider, that was the last any of them ever saw of Mahomed-El-Gebel, keeper of the Holy Yhiordes in the Pasha's palace at Bagdad.

"Now then," said the leader of the strange caravan, "my name is Ackermann, and mine is a carpet-caravan, in from Khuzistan, bound for Smyrna. How may I help you?"

"Take us as far as Damascus," answered Ryanne. "We can get on from there well enough."

"What's your name?" directly.

"Ryanne."

"And yours?"

"Fortune Chedsoye."

"Next?"

"Jones."

The humorous bruskness put a kind of spirit into them all, and they answered smilingly.

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"Ryanne and Jones are familiar enough, but Chedsoye is a new one. Here, you!" whirling suddenly upon the boys who were pressing about. He volleyed some Arabic at them, and they dropped back. "Well, I've heard some strange yarns myself in my time, but this one beats them all. Shanghaied from Cairo! Humph! If some one had told me this, anywhere else but here, I'd have called him a liar. And you, Mr. Ryanne, went into Bagdad alone and got away with that Yhiordes! It must have been the devil's own of a job."

"It was," replied Ryanne laconically. He did not know this man Ackermann; he had never heard of him; but he recognized a born leader of men when he saw him. Gray-haired, lean, bearded, sharp of word, quick of action, rude; he saw in this carpet-hunter the same indomitable qualities of the ivory-seeker. "You did not stop at Bagdad?" he asked, after the swift inventory.

"No. I came direct. I always do," grimly. "Better turn in and sleep; we'll be on the way at dawn, sharp."

"Sleep?" Ryanne laughed.

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"Sleep?" echoed George.

Fortune shook her head.

"Well, an hour to let the reaction wear away," said Ackermann. "But you've got to sleep. I'm boss now, and you won't find me an easy one," with a humorous glance at the girl.

"We are all very happy to be bossed by you," she said.

"Twenty days," Ackermann mused. "You're a plucky young woman. No hysterics?"

"Not even a sigh of discontent," put in George. "If it hadn't been for her pluck, we'd have gone to pieces just from worry. Are you Henry Ackermann, of the Oriental Company in Smyrna?"

"Yes; why?"

"I'm George P. A. Jones, of Mortimer & Jones, New York. I've heard of you; and God bless you for this night's work!"

"Mortimer & Jones? You don't say! Well, if this doesn't beat the Dutch! Why, if you're Robert E. Jones's boy, I'll sell you every carpet in the pack at cost." He laughed; and it was laughter good to hear, dry and harsh though it was. "Your dad was a fine gentleman, and one

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of the best judges of his time. You couldn't fool him a knot. He wrote me when you came into this world of sin and tribulation. Didn't they call you Percival Algernon, or something like that?"

"They did!" And George laughed, too.

"You're a sight. Any one sick? Got a medicine-chest aboard."

"No, only banged up and discouraged. I say, Mr. Ackermann, got an extra pipe or two and some 'baccy?"

"Flanagan, see what's in the chest."

Shortly Flanagan returned. He had half a dozen fresh corn-cob pipes and a thick bag of tobacco. George and Ryanne lighted up, about as near contentment as two men in their condition could possibly be.

Said Flanagan to Fortune: "Do you chew?"

Fortune looked horrified.

"Oh, I mean gum!" roared Flanagan.

No, Fortune did not possess that dubious accomplishment.

"Mighty handy when you're thirsty," Flanagan advised.

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They built up the fire and sat round it cosily. They were all more or less happy, all except Fortune. So long as she had been a captive of Mahomed, she had forced the thought from her mind; but now it came back with a full measure of misery. Never, never would she return to Mentone, not even for the things that were rightfully hers. Where would she go and what would she do? She was without money, and the only thing she possessed of value was the Soudanese trinket Ryanne had forced upon her that day in the bazaars. She heard the men talking and laughing, but without sensing. No, she could not accept charity. She must fight out her battle all alone. . . . The child of a thief: for never would her clear mind accept smuggling as other than thieving. . . . Neither could she accept pity; and she stole a glance at George, as he blew clouds of smoke luxuriantly from his mouth and nose, his eyes half closed in ecstasy. How little it took to comfort a man!

Ryanne suddenly lowered his pipe and smote his thigh. "Hell!" he muttered.

"What's up?" asked George.

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"I want you to look at me, Percival; I want you to take a good look at this thing I've been carrying round as a head."

"It looks all right," observed George, puzzled.

"Empty as a dried cocoanut! I never thought of it till this moment. I wondered why he was in such a hurry to get out. I've let that copper-hided devil get away with that nine hundred pounds!"

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CHAPTER XVII

MRS. CHEDSOYE HAS HER DOUBTS

MRS. CHEDSOYE retired to her room early that memorable December night. Her brother could await the return of Horace. She hadn't the least doubt as to the result; a green young man pitted against a seasoned veteran's duplicity. She wished Jones no harm physically; in fact, she had put down the law against it. Still, much depended upon chance. But for all her confidence of the outcome, a quality of restlessness pervaded her. She tried to analyze it, ineffectually at first. Perhaps she did not look deep enough; perhaps she did not care thoroughly to examine the source of it. Insistently, however, it recurred; and by repeated assaults it at length conquered her. It was the child.

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Did she possess, after all, a latent sense of motherhood, and was it stirring to establish itself? She really did not know. Was it not fear and doubt rather than motherly instinct? She paused in front of the mirror, but the glass solved only externals. She could not see her soul there in the reflection; she saw only the abundant gifts of nature, splendid, double-handed, prodigal. And in contemplating that reflection, she forgot for a space what she was seeking. But that child! From whom did she inherit her peculiar ideas of life? From some Puritan ancestor of her father's; certainly not from her side. She had never bothered her head about Fortune, save to house and clothe her, till the past forty-eight hours. And now it was too late to pick up the thread she had cast aside as not worth considering. To no one is given perfect wisdom; and she recognized the flaw in hers that had led her to ignore the mental attitude of the girl. She had not even made a friend of her; a mistake, a bit of stupidity absolutely foreign to her usual keenness. The child lacked little of being beautiful, and in three or four years she would be. Mrs. Chedsoye was without jeal-

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ousy; she accepted beauty in all things unreservedly. Possessing as she did an incomparable beauty of her own, she could well afford to be generous. Perhaps the true cause of this disturbance lay in the knowledge that there was one thing her daughter had inherited from her directly, almost identically; indeed, of this pattern the younger possessed the wider margin of the two: courage. Mrs. Chedsoye was afraid of nothing except wrinkles, and Fortune was too young to know this fear. So then, the mother slowly began to comprehend the spirit which had given life to this singular perturbation. Fortune had declared that she would run away; and she had the courage to carry out the threat.

Resolutely Mrs. Chedsoye rang for her maid Celeste. Thoughts like these only served to disturb the marble smoothness of her forehead.

The two began to pack. That is to say, Celeste began; Mrs. Chedsoye generally took charge of these manœuvers from the heights, as became the officer in command. Bending was likely to enlarge the vein in the neck; and all those beautiful gowns would not be worth a *soldi* without the

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added perfection of her lineless throat and neck. She was getting along in years, too, a fact which was assuming the proportions of a cross; and more and more she must husband these lingering (not to say beguiling) evidences of youthfulness.

"We might as well get Fortune's things out of the way, too, Celeste."

"Yes, Madame."

"And bring my chocolate at half after eight in the morning. It is quite possible that we shall sail to-morrow night from Port Saïd. If not from there, from Alexandria. It all depends upon the booking, which can not be very heavy going west this time of year."

"As madame knows!" came from the depth of the cavernous trunk. Celeste was no longer surprised; at least she never evinced this emotion. For twelve years now she had gone from one end of the globe to the other, upon the shortest notice. While surprise was lost to her or under such control as to render it negligible, she still shivered with pleasurable excitement at the thought of entering a port. Madame was so clever, so transcendently clever! If she, Celeste,

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had not been loyal, she might have retired long ago, and owned a shop of her own in the busy Rue de Rivoli. But that would have meant a humdrum existence; and besides, she would have grown fat, which, of the seven horrors confronting woman, so madame said, was first in number.

"Be very careful how you handle that blue ball-gown."

"Oh, Madame!" reproachfully.

"It is the silver braid. Do not press the rosettes too harshly."

Celeste looked up. Mrs. Chedsoye answered her inquiring gaze with a thin smile.

"You are wonderful, Madame!"

"And so are you, Celeste, in your way."

At ten o'clock Mrs. Chedsoye was ready for her pillow. She slept fitfully; awoke at eleven and again at twelve. After that she knew nothing more till the maid roused her with the cup of chocolate. She sat up and sipped slowly. Celeste waited at the bedside with the tray. Her admiration for her mistress never waned. Mrs. Chedsoye was just as beautiful in dishabille as in a ball-gown. She drained the cup, and as she turned to

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replace it upon the tray, dropped it with a clatter, a startled cry coming from her lips.

"Madame?"

"Fortune's bed!"

It had not been slept in. The steamer-cloak lay across the counterpane exactly where Celeste herself had laid it the night before. Mrs. Chedsoye sprang out of her bed and ran barefoot to the other. Fortune had not been in the room since dinner-time.

"Celeste, dress me as quickly as possible. Hurry! Something has happened to Fortune."

Never, in all her years of service, could she recollect such a toilet as madame made that morning. And never before had she shown such concern over her daughter. It was amazing!

"The little fool! The little fool!" Mrs. Chedsoye repeatedly murmured as the nimble fingers of the maid flew over her. "The silly little fool; and at a time like this!" Not that remorse of any kind stirred Mrs. Chedsoye's conscience; she was simply extremely annoyed.

She hastened out into the corridor and knocked at the door of her brother's room. No answer.

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She flew down-stairs, and there she saw him coming in from the street. He greeted her cheerily.

"It's all right, Kate; plenty of room on the *Ludwig*. We shall take the afternoon train for Port Saïd. She sails at dawn to-morrow instead of to-night. . . . What's up?" suddenly noting his sister's face.

"Fortune did not return to her room last night."

"What? Where do you suppose the little fool went, then?"

They both seemed to look upon Fortune as a little fool.

"Yesterday she threatened to run away."

"Run away? Kate, be sensible. How the deuce could she run away? She hasn't a penny. It takes money to go anywhere over here. She has probably found some girl friend, and has spent the night with her. We'll soon find out where she is." The Major wasn't worried.

"Have you seen Horace?" with discernible anxiety.

"No. I didn't wait up for him. He's sleeping off a night of it. You know his failing."

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"Find out if he *is* in his room. Go to the porter's bureau and inquire for both him and Jones."

The Major, perceiving that his sister was genuinely alarmed, rushed over to the bureau. No, neither Mr. Ryanne nor Mr. Jones had been in the hotel since yesterday. Would the porter send some one up to the rooms of those gentlemen to make sure? Certainly. No; there was no one in the rooms. The Major was now himself perturbed. He went back to Mrs. Chedsoye.

"Kate, neither has been in his room since yesterday. If you want my opinion, it is this: Hoddy has sequestered Jones all right, and is somewhere in town, sleeping off the effects of a night of it."

"He has run away with Fortune!" she cried. Her expression was tragic. She couldn't have told whether it was due to her daughter's disappearance or to Horace's defection. "Did he not threaten?"

"Sh! not so loud, Kate."

"The little simpleton defied me yesterday, and declared she would leave me."

"Oho!" The Major fingered his imperial. "That

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puts a new face to the subject. But Jones! He has not turned up. We can not move till we find out what has become of him. I know. I'll jump into a carriage and see if he got as far as the English-Bar."

Mrs. Chedsoye did not go up-stairs, but paced the lounging-room, lithe and pantherish. Frequently she paused, as if examining the patterns in the huge carpets. She entered the reception-room, came back, wandered off into the ball-room, stopped to inspect the announcement hanging upon the bulletin-board, returned to the windows and watched the feluccas sail past as the great bridge opened; and during all these aimless occupations but a single thought busied her mind: what could a man like Horace see in a chit like Fortune?

It was an hour and a half before the Major put in an appearance. He was out of breath and temper.

"Come up to the room." Once there, he sat down and bade her do likewise. "There's the devil to pay. You heard Hoddy speak of the nigger who guarded the Holy Yhiordes, and that he

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wanted to get out of Cairo before he turned up? Well, he turned up. He fooled Hoddy to the top of his bent. So far as I could learn, Fortune and Hoddy and Jones are all in the same boat, kidnapped by this Mahomed, and carried out into the desert, headed, God knows where! Now, don't get excited. Take it easy. Luck is with us, for Hoddy left all the diagrams with me. We need him, but not so much that we can't go on without him. You see, these Arabs are like the Hindus; touch anything that concerns their religion, and they'll have your hair off. How Fortune got into it I can't imagine, unless Mahomed saw her with Hoddy and jumped to the conclusion that they were lovers. All this Mahomed wants is the rug; and he is going to hold them till he gets it. No use notifying the police. No one would know where to find him. None of them will come to actual harm. Anyhow, the coast is clear. Kate, there's a big thing in front. No nerves. We've got to go to-day. Time is everything. Our butler and first man cabled this morning that they had just started in, and that everything was running like clock-

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work. We'll get into New York in time for the *coup*. Remember, I was against the whole business at the start, but now I'm going to see it off."

Feverishly Mrs. Chedsoye prepared for the journey. She was irritable to Celeste, she was unbearable to her brother, who took a seat in a forward compartment to be rid of her. It was only when they went aboard the steamer that night that she became reconciled to the inevitable. At any rate, the presence of Jones would counteract any influence Horace might have gained over Fortune. That the three of them might suffer unheard-of miseries never formed thought in her mind. It appealed to her in the sense of a comedy which annoyed rather than amused her.

They were greeted effusively by Wallace, he of the bulbous nose; and his first inquiry was of Ryanne. Briefly the Major told him what had happened and added his fears. Wallace was greatly cast-down. Hoddy had so set his heart upon this venture that it was a shame to proceed without him. He had warned him at the beginning

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about that infernal rug; but Hoddy was always set in his daredevil schemes. So long as the Major had the plans, he supposed that they could turn the trick without Hoddy's assistance; only, it seemed rather hard for him not to be in the sport.

"He told me that nothing would give him greater pleasure than to stick his fist into the first bag of yellow-boys. There was something mysterious in the way he used to chuckle over the thing when I first sprung it on him. He saw a joke somewhere. Let's go into the smoke-room for a peg. It won't hurt either of us. And that poor little girl! It's a hell of a world; eh?"

The Major admitted that it was; but he did not add that Fortune's welfare or ill-fare was of little or no concern of his. The little spitfire had always openly despised him.

They were drinking silently and morosely, when Mrs. Chedsoye, pale and anxious, appeared in the companionway. She beckoned them to follow her down to her cabin. Had Fortune arrived? Had Ryanne? She did not answer. Arriving at her cabin she pushed the two wondering men inside,

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and pointed at the floor. A large steamer-roll lay unstrapped, spread out.

"I only just opened it," she said. "I never thought of looking into it at Cairo. Here, it looked so bulky that I was curious."

"Why, it's that damned Yhiordes!" exclaimed the Major wrathfully. "What the devil is it doing in Fortune's steamer-roll?"

"That is what I should like to know. If they have been kidnapped in order to recover the rug, whatever will become of them?" And Mrs. Chedsoye touched the rug with her foot, absently. She was repeating in her mind that childish appeal: "You don't know how loyal I should have been!"

They took the first sailing out of Naples. Twelve days later they landed at the foot of Fourteenth Street. There was some trifling difficulty over the rug. It had been declared; but as Mrs. Chedsoye and her brother always declared foreign residence, there was a question as to whether it was dutiable or not. Being a copy, it was not an original work of art, therefore not exempt, and so forth and so on. It was finally decided that

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Mrs. Chedsoye must pay a duty. The Major paid grumblingly, very cleverly assuming an irritability well known to the inspectors. The way the United States Government mulcted her citizens for the benefit of the few was a scandal of the nations.

A smooth-faced young man approached them from out the crowd.

"Is this Major Callahan?"

"Yes. This must be Mr. Reynolds, the agent?"

"Yes. Everything is ready for your occupancy. Your butler and first man have everything shipshape. I could have turned over to you Mr. Jones's."

"Not at all, not at all," said the Major. "They would have been strangers to us and we to them. Our own servants are best."

"You must be very good friends of my client?"

"I have known him for years," said Mrs. Chedsoye sweetly. "It was at his own suggestion that we take the house over for the month. He really insisted that we should pay him nothing; but, of course, such an arrangement could not be thought of. Oh, good-by, Mr. Wallace," tolerantly. "We hope to see you again some day."

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Wallace, taking up his rôle once more, tipped his hat and rushed away for one of his favorite haunts.

"Bounder!" growled the Major. "Well, well; a ship's deck is always Liberty-Hall."

"You have turned your belongings over to an expressman?" asked the agent. These were charming people; and any doubts he might have entertained were dissipated. And why should he have any doubts? Jones was an eccentric young chap, anyhow. An explanatory letter (written by the Major in Jones's careless hand), backed up by a cable, was enough authority for any reasonable man.

"Everything is out of the way," said the Major.

"Then, if you wish, I can take you right up to the house in my car. Your butler said that he would have lunch ready when you arrived."

"Very kind of you. How noisy New York is! You can take our hand-luggage?" Mrs. Chedsoye would have made St. Anthony uneasy of mind; Reynolds, young, alive, metaphorically fell at her feet.

"Plenty of room for it."

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"I am glad of that. You see, Mr. Jones intrusted a fine old rug to us to bring home for him; and I shouldn't want anything to happen to it."

The Major looked up at the roof of the dingy shed. He did not care to have Reynolds note the flicker of admiration in his eyes. The cleverest woman of them all! The positive touch to the whole daredevil affair! And he would not have thought of it had he lived to be a thousand. "One might as well disembark in a stable," he said aloud. "Ah! We are ready to go, then?"

They entered the limousine and went off buzzing and zigzagging among the lumbering trucks. The agent drove the car himself.

"Where is Jones now?" he asked of the Major, who sat at his left. "Haven't had a line from him for a month."

"Just before we sailed," said Mrs. Chedsoye through the window, over the Major's shoulder, "he went into the desert for a fortnight or so; with a caravan. He had heard of some fabulous carpet."

Touch number two. The Major grinned. "Jones

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is one of the best judges I have ever met. He was off at a bound. I only hope he will get back before we leave for California." The Major drew up his collar. It was a cold, blustery day.

The agent was delighted. What luck a fellow like Jones had! To wander all over creation and to meet charming people! And when they invited him to remain for luncheon, the victory was complete.

Mrs. Chedsoye strolled in and out of the beautifully appointed rooms. Never had she seen more excellent taste. Not too much; everything perfectly placed, one object nicely balanced against another. Here was a rare bit of Capo di Monte, there a piece of Sèvres or Canton. Some houses, with their treasures, look like museums, but this one did not. The owner had not gone mad over one subject; here was a sane and prudent collector. The great yellow Chinese carpet represented a fortune; she knew enough about carpets to realize this fact. Ivories, jades, lapis-lazuli, the precious woods, priceless French and Japanese tapestries, some fine paintings and bronzes; the rooms were full of unspoken romance and adventure; echoed

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with war and tragedy, too. And Fortune might have married a man like this one. A possibility occurred to her, and the ghost of a smile moderated the interest in her face. They might be upon the desert for weeks. Who knew what might not happen to two such romantic simpletons?

The butler and the first man (who was also the cook) were impeccable types of servants; so thought Reynolds. They moved silently and anticipated each want. Reynolds determined that very afternoon to drop a line to Jones and compliment him upon his good taste in the selection of his friends. A subsequent press of office work, however, drove the determination out of his mind.

The instant his car carried him out of sight, a strange scene was enacted. The butler and the first man seized the Major by the arms, and the three executed a kind of *pas-seul*. Mrs. Chedsoye eyed these manifestations of joy stonily.

"Now then, what's been done?" asked the Major, pulling down his cuffs and shaking the wrinkles from his sleeves.

"Half done!" cried the butler.

"Fine! What do you do with the refuse?"

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"Cart it away in an automobile every night, after the gun starts down the other end of the street."

"Gun?" The Major did not quite understand.

"Gun or bull; that's the argot for policeman."

"Thieves' argot," said Mrs. Chedsoye contemptuously.

The butler laughed. He knew Gioconda of old.

"Where's that wall-safe?" the Major wanted to know.

"Behind that sketch by Detaille." And the butler, strange to say, pronounced it Det-i.

"Can you open it?"

"Tried, but failed. Wallace is the man for that."

"He'll be along in an hour or so."

"Where's Ryanne?"

"Don't know; don't care." The Major sketched the predicament of their fellow-conspirator.

The butler whistled, but callously. One more or less didn't matter in such an enterprise.

When Wallace arrived he applied his talent and acquired science to the wall-safe, and finally swung outward the little steel-door. The Major pushed

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him aside and thrust a hand into the metaled cavity, drawing out an exquisite Indian casket of rosewood and mother-of-pearl. He opened the lid and dipped a hand within. Emeralds, deep and light and shaded, cut and uncut and engraved, flawed and almost perfect. He raised a handful and let them tinkle back into the casket. One hundred in all, beauties, every one of them, and many famous.

And while he toyed with them, pleased as a child would have been over a handful of marbles, Mrs. Chedsoye spread out the ancient Yhiordes in the library. She stood upon the central pattern, musing. Her mood was not one which she had called into being; not often did she become retrospective; the past to her was always like a page in a book, once finished, turned down. Her elbow in one palm, her chin in the other, she stared without seeing. It was this house, this home, it was each sign of riches without luxury or ostentation, where money expressed itself by taste and simplicity; a home such as she had always wanted. And why, with all her beauty and intellect, why had she not come into possession? She knew.

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Love that gives had never been hers; hers had been the love that receives, self-love. She had bartered her body once for riches and had been fooled, and she never could do it again. . . . And the child was overflowing with the love that gives. She couldn't understand. The child was the essence of it; and she, her mother, had always laughed at her.

The flurry of snow outside in the court she saw not. Her fancy re-formed the pretty garden at Mentone, inclosed by pink-washed walls. Many a morning from her window she had watched Fortune among the flowers, going from one to the other, like a bee or a butterfly. She had watched her grow, too, with that same detachment a machinist feels as he puts together the invention of another man. Would she ever see her again? Her shoulders moved ever so little. Probably not. She had blundered wilfully. She should have waited, thrown the two together, manœuvered. And she had permitted this adventure to obsess her! She might have stood within this house by right of law, motherhood, marriage. Ryanne was in love with Fortune, and Jones by

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this time might be. The desert was a terribly lonely place.

She wished it might be Jones. And immediately retrospection died away from her gaze and actualities resumed their functions. The wish was not without a phase of humor, formed as it was upon this magic carpet; but it nowise disturbed the gravity of her expression.

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CHAPTER XVIII

THE MAN WHO DIDN'T CARE

IT WAS the first of February when Ackermann's caravan drew into the ancient city of Damascus. That part of the caravan deserted by Mahomed put out for Cairo immediately they struck the regular camel-way. Fortune, George and Ryanné were in a pitiable condition, heart and body weary, in rags and tatters. George, now that the haven was assured, dropped his forced buoyancy, his prattle, his jests. He had done all a mortal man could do to keep up the spirits of his co-unfortunates; and he saw that, most of the time, he had wasted his talents. Ryanne, sullen and morose, often told him to "shut up"; which wasn't exhilarating. And Fortune viewed his attempts without sensing them and frequently looked at him without seeing him.

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Now, all this was not particularly comforting to the man who loved her and was doing what he could to lighten the dreariness of the journey. He made allowances, however; besides suffering unusual privations, Fortune had had a frightful mental shock. A girl of her depth of character could not be expected to rise immediately to the old level. Sometimes, while gathered about the evening fire, he would look up to find her sad eyes staring at him, and it mattered not if he stared in return; a kind of clairvoyance blurred visibilities, for she was generally looking into her garden at Mentone and wondering when this horrible dream would pass. Subjects for conversation were exhausted in no time. Dig as he might, George could find nothing new; and often he recounted the same tale twice of an evening. Sardonic laughter from Ryanne.

Ackermann had given them up as hopeless. He was a strong, vain, domineering man, kindly at heart, however, but impatient. When he told a story, he demanded the attention of all; so, when Ryanne yawned before his eyes, and George drew

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pictures in the sand, and the girl fell asleep with her head upon her knees, he drew off abruptly and left them to their own devices. He had crossed and recrossed the silences so often that he was no longer capable of judging accurately another man's mental processes. That they had had a strange and numbing experience he readily understood; but now that they were out of duress and headed for the coast, he saw no reason why they should not act like human beings.

They still put up the small tent for Fortune, but the rest of them slept upon the sand, under the stars. Once, George awoke as the dawn was gilding the east. Silhouetted against the sky he saw Fortune. She was standing straight, her hands pressed at her sides, her head tilted back—a tense attitude. He did not know it, but she was asking God why these things should be. He threw off his blanket and ran to her.

"Fortune, you mustn't do that. You will catch cold."

"I can not sleep," she replied simply.

He took her by the hand and led her to the tent. "Try," he said. Then he did something he

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had never done before to any woman save his mother. He kissed her hand, turned quickly, and went over to his blanket. She remained motionless before the tent. The hand fascinated her. From the hand her gaze traveled to the man settling himself comfortably under his blanket. . . . Pity, pity; that was ever to be her portion; pity!

In Damascus the trio presented themselves at the one decent hotel, and but for Ackermann's charges upon the manager, it is doubtful if he would have accepted them as guests; for a more suspicious-looking trio he had never set eyes upon. (A hotel man weighs a person by the quality of his clothes.) Moreover, they carried no luggage. Ackermann went sponsor; and knowing something of the integrity of the rug-hunter, the manager surrendered. And when George presented his letter of credit at the Imperial Ottoman Bank, again it was Ackermann who vouched for him. It had been agreed to say nothing of the character of their adventure. None of them wanted to be followed by curious eyes.

With a handful of British gold in his pocket,

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George faced the future hopefully. He took his companions in and about town, hunting the shops for clothing, which after various difficulties they succeeded in finding. It was ill-fitting and cheap, but it would serve till they reached either Alexandria or Naples.

"How are you fixed?" asked Ryanne, gloomily surveying George's shoddy cotton-wool suit.

"Cash in hand?"

"Yes."

"About four-hundred pounds. At Naples I can cable. Do you want any?"

"Would you mind advancing me two months' salary?"

"Ryanne, do you really mean to stick to that proposition?"

"It's on my mind just now."

"Well, we'll go back to the bank and I'll draw a hundred pounds for you. You can pay your own expenses as we go. But what are we going to do in regard to Fortune?"

"See that she gets safely back to Mentone."

"Suppose she will not go there?"

"It's up to you, Percival; it's all up to you.

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You're the gay Lochinvar from the west. I'm not sure—no one ever is regarding a woman—but I think she'll listen to you. She wouldn't give an ear to a scallawag like me. This caravan business has put me outside the pale. I've lost caste."

"You're only desperate and discouraged; you can pull up straight."

"Much obliged!"

"You haven't looked at life normally; that's what the matter is."

"Solon, you're right. There's that poor devil back in Bagdad. I've killed a man, Percival. It doesn't mix well with my dreams."

"You said that it was in self-defense."

"And God knows it was. But if I hadn't gone after that damned rug, he'd have been alive to-day. Oh, damn it all; let's go back to the hotel and order that club-steak, or the best imitation they have. I'm going to have a pint of wine. I'm as dull as a ditch in a paddy-field."

"A bottle or two will not hurt any of us. We'll ask Ackermann. For God knows where we'd have been to-day but for him. And let him do all the yarning. It will please him."

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"And while he gabs, we'll get the best of the steak and the wine!" For the first time in days Ryanne's laughter had a bit of the erstwhile rollicking tone.

The dinner was an event. No delicacy (mostly canned) was overlooked. The manager, as he heard the guineas jingle in George's pocket, was filled with shame; not over his original doubts, but relative to his lack of perception. The tourists who sat at the other tables were scandalized at the popping of champagne-corks. Sanctimonious faces glared reproof. A jovial spirit in the Holy Land was an anacronism, not to be tolerated. And wine! Horrible! Doubtless, when they retired to their native back-porches, they retold with never-ending horror of having witnessed such a scene and having heard such laughter upon the sacred soil.

Even Fortune laughed, though Ryanne's ear, keenest then, detected the vague note of hysteria. If the meat was tough, the potatoes greasy, the vegetables flavorless, the wine flat, none of them appeared to be aware of it. If Ackermann could talk he could also eat; and the clatter of forks and

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knives was the theme rather than the variation to the symphony.

George felt himself drawn deeper and deeper into those magic waters from which, as in death, there is no return. She was so lonely, so sad and forlorn, that there was as much brother as lover in his sympathy. How patient she had been during all those inconceivable hardships! How brave and steady; and never a murmur! The single glass of wine had brought the color back to her cheek and the sparkle into her eye; yet he was sure that behind this apparent liveliness lay the pitiful desperation of the helpless. He had not spoken again about old Mortimer. He would wait till after he had sent a long cable. Then he would speak and show her the answer, of which he had not a particle of doubt. As matters now stood, he could not tell her that he loved her; his quixotic sense of chivalry was too strong to permit this step, urge as his heart might upon it. She might misinterpret his love as born of pity, and that would be the end of everything. He was confident now that Ryanne meant nothing to her. Her lack of enthusiasm, whenever Ryanne

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spoke to her in these days; the peculiar horizontality of her lips and brows, whenever Ryanne offered a trifling courtesy—all pointed to distrust. George felt a guilty gladness. After all, why shouldn't she distrust Ryanne?

George concluded that he must acquire patience. She was far too loyal to run away without first giving him warning. In the event of her refusing Mortimer's roof and protection, he knew what his plans would be. Some one else could do the buying for Mortimer & Jones; his business would be to revolve round this lonely girl, to watch and guard her without her being aware of it. Of what use were riches if he could not put them to whatever use he chose? So he would wait near her, to see that she came and went unmolested, till against that time when she would recognize how futile her efforts were and how wide and high the wall of the world was.

That mother of hers! To his mind it was positively unreal that one so charming and lovely should be at heart strong as the wind and merciless as the sea. His mother had been everything; hers, worse than none, an eternal question. What

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a drama she had moved about in, without understanding!

George did not possess that easy and adjustable sophistry which made Ryanne look upon smuggling as a clever game between two cheats. His point of view coincided with Fortune's; it was thievery, more or less condoned, but the ethics covering it were soundly established. He had come very near being culpable himself. True, he would not have been guilty of smuggling for profit; but none the less he would have tried to cheat the government. His sin had found him out; he had now neither the rug nor his thousand pounds.

All these cogitations passed through his mind, disjointedly, as the dinner progressed toward its end. They bade Ackermann good-by and God-speed, as he was to leave early for Beirut, upon his way to Smyrna. Fortune went to bed; Ryanne sought the billiard-room and knocked about the balls; while George asked the manager if he could send a cable from the hotel. Certainly he could. It took some time to compose the cable to Mortimer; and it required some gold besides. Mortimer

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must have a fair view of the case; and George presented it, requesting a reply to be sent to Cook's in Naples, where they expected to be within ten days.

"How much will this be?"

The porter got out his telegraph-book and studied the rates carefully.

"Twelve pounds and six, sir."

The porter greeted each sovereign with a genuflection, the lowest being the twelfth. George pocketed the receipt and went in search of Ryanne.

But that gentleman was no longer in the billiard-room. Indeed, he had gone quietly to the other hotel and written a cable himself, the code of which was not to be found in any book. For a long time he seemed to be in doubt, for he folded and refolded his message half a dozen times before his actions became decisive. He tore it up and threw the scraps upon the floor and hastened into the street, as if away from temptation. He walked fast and indirectly, smoking innumerable cigarettes. He was fighting, and fighting hard, the evil in him against the good, the chances of the

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future against the irreclaimable past. At the end of an hour he returned to the strange hotel. His lips were puffed and bleeding. He had smoked so many cigarettes and had pulled them so impatiently from his mouth, that the dry paper had cracked the delicate skin.

He rewrote his cable and paid for the sending of it. Then he poked about the unfamiliar corridors till he found the dingy bar. He sat down before a peg of whisky, which was followed by many more, each a bit stiffer than its predecessor. At last, when he had had enough to put a normal man's head upon the table or to cover his face with the mask of inanity, Ryanne fell into the old habit of talking aloud.

"Horace, old top, what's the use? We'd just like to be good if we could; eh? But they won't let us. We'd grow raving mad in a monastery. We were honest at the time, but we couldn't stand the monotony of watching green olives turn purple upon the silvery bough. Nay, nay!"

He pushed the glass away from him and studied the air-bubbles as they formed, rose to the surface, and were dissipated.

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"No matter what the game has been, somehow or other, they've bashed us, and we've lost out."

He emptied the glass and ordered another. He and the bartender were alone.

"After all, love is like money. It's better to live frugally upon the interest than to squander the capital and go bankrupt. And who cares, anyhow?"

He drank once more, dropped a half-sovereign upon the table, and pushed back his chair. His eyes were bloodshot now, and the brown of his skin had become a slaty tint; but he walked steadily enough into the reading-room, where he wrote a short letter. It was not without a perverted sense of humor, for a smile twisted his lips till he had sealed the letter and addressed the envelope to George Percival Algernon Jones. He stuffed it into a pocket and went out whistling *The Heavy Dragoons* from the opera *Patience.*

Before the lighted window of a shop he paused. He swayed a little. From a pocket of his new coat he pulled out a glove. It was gray and small and much wrinkled. From time to time he drew it through his fingers, staring the while at the

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tawdry trinkets in the shop-window. Finally he looked down at the token. He became very still. A moment passed; then he flung the glove into the gutter, and proceeded to his own hotel. He left the letter with the porter, paid his bill, and went out again into the dark, chill night.

He was now what he had been two months ago, the man who didn't care.

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CHAPTER XIX

FORTUNE DECIDES

GEORGE and Fortune were seated at breakfast. It was early morning. At ten they were to depart for Jaffa, to take the tubby French packet there to Alexandria. They could just about make it, and any delay meant a week or ten days longer upon this ragged and inhospitable coast.

"Ryanne has probably overslept. After breakfast I'll go up and rout him out. The one thing that really tickles me," George continued, as he pared the tough rind from the skinny bacon, "is, we shan't have any luggage. Think of the blessing of traveling without a trunk or a valise or a steamer-roll!"

"Without even a comb or a hairbrush!"

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"It's great fun." George broke his toast.

And Fortune wondered how she should tell him. She was without any toilet articles. She hadn't even a tooth-brush; and it was quite out of the question for her to bother him about such trifles, much as she needed them. She would have to live in the clothes she wore, and trust that the ship's stewardess might help her out in the absolute necessities.

Here the head-waiter brought George a letter. The address was enough for George. No one but Ryanne could have written it. Without excusing himself, he ripped off the envelope and read the contents. Fortune could not resist watching him, for she grasped quickly that only Ryanne could have written a letter here in Damascus. At first the tan upon George's cheeks darkened—the sudden suffusion of blood; then it became lighter, and the mouth and eyes and nose became stern.

"Is it bad news?"

"It all depends upon how you look at it. For my part, good riddance to bad rubbish. Here, read it yourself."

She read:

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"My Dear Percival:

"After all, I find that I can not reconcile myself to the dullness of your olive-groves. I shall send the five-hundred to you when I reach New York. With me it is as it was with the devil. When he was sick, he vowed he would be a saint; but when he got well, devil a saint was he. There used to be a rhyme about it, but I have forgotten that. Anyhow, there you are. I feel that I am conceding a point in regard to the money. It is contrary to the laws and by-laws of the United Romance and Adventure Company to refund. Still, I intend to hold myself to it.

"With hale affection,

"Ryanne."

"What do you think of that?" demanded George hotly. "I never did a good action in my life that wasn't served ill. I'm a soft duffer, if there ever was one."

"I shall never be ungrateful for your kindness to me."

"Oh, hang it! You're different; you're not like any other woman in the world," he blurted; and immediately was seized with a mild species of fright.

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Fortune stirred her coffee and delicately scooped up the swirling circles of foam.

"Old maids call that money," he said understandingly, eager to cover up his boldness. "My mother used to tell me that there were lots of wonders in a tea-cup."

"Tell me about your mother."

To him it was a theme never lacking in new expressions. When he spoke of his mother, it altered the clear and boyish note in his voice; it became subdued, reverent. He would never be aught than guileless; it was not in his nature to divine anything save his own impulses. While he thought he was pleasing her, each tender recollection, each praise, was in fact a nail added to her crucifixion, self-imposed. However, she never lowered her eyes, but kept them bravely directed into his. In the midst of one of his panegyrics he caught sight of his watch which he had placed at the side of his plate.

"By Jove! quarter to nine. I've got an errand or two to do, and there's no need of your running your feet off on my account. I'll be back quarter after." He dug into his pocket and counted out

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fifty pounds in paper and gold. "You keep this till I get back."

She pushed it aside, half rising from her chair.

"Fortune, listen. Hereafter I am George, your brother George; and I do not want you ever to question any action of mine. I am leaving this money in case some accident befell me. You never can tell." He took her hand and firmly pressed it down upon the money. "In half an hour, sister, I'll be back. You did not think that I was going to run away?"

"No."

"Do you understand me now?"

"Yes."

While he was gone she remained seated at the table. She made little pyramids of the gold, divided the even dates from the odd, arranged Maltese crosses and circles and stars. . . . . Pity, pity! Well, why should she rebel against it? Was it not more than she had had hitherto? What should she do? She closed her eyes. She would trouble her tired brain no more about the future till they reached Naples. She would let this one week drift her how it would.

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George came in under the time-limit of his adventure. He had been upon the most difficult errand imaginable, at least from a bachelor's point of view. He carried two hand-bags. One of these he deposited in Fortune's lap.

"Shall I open it?"

"If you wish."

She noted his embarrassment, and her immediate curiosity was not to be denied. She slipped the catch and looked inside. There were combs and brushes, soap and tooth-powder and talc, a manicure-set, a pair of soft woolen slippers, and . . . She glanced up quickly. The faintest rose stole under her cheeks. It was droll; it was pathetically funny. She would have given worlds to have seen him making the purchases.

"You are not offended?" he stammered.

"Why should I be? I am human; I have slept and lived for days in a dress, and worn my hair down my back for lack of hair-pins and combs. I am sure that it is a very nice nightgown."

Laughter overcame her. He laughed, too; not because the situation appealed to him as laughable, but because there was something, an indefinable

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something, in that laughter of hers that made him wonderfully happy.

"Mr. Jones . . . "

"George," he interrupted determinedly.

"Brother George, it was very kind and thoughtful of you. Not one man in a thousand would have thought of—of . . . hair-pins!" More laughter.

"I didn't think of them; it was the clerk."

"He . . . "

"She."

"Well, then, she will achieve great things," lightly, though her heart was full.

Tactfully he reached over and swept up the money.

"Shall I ever be able to repay you?" she said.

"Yes, by letting me be your brother; by not deciding the future till we land in Naples; by letting me keep in touch with you, whatever your ultimate decision may be. That isn't much. Will you promise that?"

"Yes."

They spoke no more of Ryanne. It was as though he had dropped out of their lives com-

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pletely. To a certain extent he had. They were to meet him once again, however, in the last act of this whimsical drama, which had drawn them both out of the commonplace and dropped them for a full spin upon the whirligig of life.

In due time they arrived at Alexandria. There they found the great transatlantic liner, homeward bound.

Ryanne would beat them into New York by ten days. He had picked up a boat of the P. & O. line at Port Saïd, sailing without stop to Marseilles. From there to Cherbourg was a trifling journey.

George knew the captain, and the captain not only knew George, but had known George's father before him. The young man went to the heart of the matter at once; and when he had finished his remarkable tale, the captain lowered his cigar. It had gone out.

"And all this happened in the year 1909-1910! If any one but you, Mr. Jones, had told me this, I'd have sent him ashore as a lunatic. You have reported it?"

"What good would it do? We are out of it, and

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that's enough. More, we do not want any one to know what we've been through. If the newspapers got hold of it, there would be no living."

"You leave it to me," said the big-hearted German. "From here to Naples she shall be as mine own daughter. You have not told me all?"

"No; only what I had of necessity to tell."

"Well, you know best. I shall do my share to make her feel at home. She is as pretty as a flower."

To this George agreed, but not verbally.

The steamer weighed anchor at six o'clock that evening, with only a handful of passengers for the trip to Naples. George had wired from Damascus to Cairo to have his luggage sent on, and he saw it put aboard himself. Without letting Fortune know, he had also telegraphed the hotel to forward whatever she had left; but the return wire informed him that Mrs. Chedsoye had taken everything.

They were leaning against the starboard-rail, watching the slowly converging lights of the harbor. Fortune had borrowed a cloak from her

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stewardess and George wore the mufti of the first-officer. The captain had offered his, but George had declined. He would have been lost in its ample folds.

"I can not understand why they made no effort to find you," he mused. "It doesn't seem quite human."

"Don't you understand? It is simple. My mother believes that Horace and I ran away together. If not that, I ran away myself, as I that day threatened to do. In either case, she saw nothing could be done in trying to find out where I had gone. Perhaps she knows exactly what did happen. Doubtless she has sent on my things to Mentone, which, of course, I shall never see again. No, no! I can not go back there. I have known the misery of suspense long enough." She lowered her head to the rail.

He came quite near to her. His arms went out toward her, only to drop down. He must wait. It was very hard. But nothing prevented his putting forth a hand to press hers reassuringly, and saying: "Don't do that, Fortune. It makes my heart ache to see a woman cry."

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"I am not crying," came in muffled tones. "I am only sad, and tired, tired."

"Everything will come out all right in the end," he encouraged. "Of course you are tired. What woman wouldn't be, having gone through what you have? Here; let's sit in the steamer-chairs till the bugle blows for dinner. I'm a bit fagged out myself."

They lay back in the chairs, and no longer cared to talk. The lights twinkled, but fainter and fainter, till at last only the pale line between the sky and the sea remained. She turned her head and looked sharply at him. He was sound asleep. "Poor boy!" she murmured softly. "How care-worn!" There was something grotesque in the mask of desert tan and shaven skin. How patient he had been through it all, and how kind and gentle to her! She remembered now of seeing him that night in Cairo, and of remarking how young and fresh he seemed in comparison to the men she knew and had met. And she must leave him, to go into the world and fight her own battles. If God had but given to her a brother like this! But brother he never could be, no, not even in

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the pleasant sense of adoption. She did not want pity. . . . To think of his getting those things for her in Damascus! . . . Pity suggested that she was weak and helpless, whereas she knew that she was both patient and strong. . . . What did she want? She glanced up and down the deck. It was totally deserted save for them. Then, "clad in the beauty of a thousand stars," she leaned over and down and brushed his hand with her lips.

And George slept on. Only the blare of the bugle brought him back to mundane affairs. He was hungry, and he announced the fact with gusto. They would dine well that night. The captain placed Fortune at his right and George at his left, and broached a bottle of fine old Johannisberger. And the three of them had coffee in the smoke-room. If the other passengers had any curiosity, they did not manifest it openly.

Upon finding that they had no real need of staying over in Naples, the captain urged that they take the return voyage with him. He saw more than either of the young people, with those blue Teutonic eyes of his. George promised to let him

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know within a dozen hours of the sailing. Certainly Fortune would decide one way or the other within that time.

Both had seen the Vesuvian bay many times, with never-failing love and interest. They sailed across the bay in the bright clearness of the morning.

"You are going back with me," George announced in a tone which inferred that nothing more was to be said upon the subject. But, for all his confidence, there was a great and heavy fear upon his heart as he asked for mail at the little inclosure at Cook's, in the Galleria Vittoria. There was a cable; nothing more.

"Now, Fortune . . . "

"Have I ever given you permission to call me by that name?"

"Why . . . "

"Have I?"

"No."

"Then I give you that permission now."

"What do you frighten a man like that for?" he cried. "What I was going to say . . . "

"Fortune."

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"What I was going to say, Fortune, was this: here is the cable from Mortimer. I'm not going to open it till after dinner to-night. We'll go up to the Bertolini to dine. You'll stay there for the night, while I put up at the Bristol, which is only a little ways up the Corso. I'm not going to ask you a question till coffee. Then we'll thrash out the subject till there isn't a grain left."

She made no protest. Secretly she was pleased to be bullied like this. It proved that among all these swarming peoples there was one interested in her welfare. But she knew in her heart what she was going to say when the proper time came. She did not wish to spoil his dinner. She was also going to put her courage to its supreme test: borrow a hundred pounds, and bravely promise to pay him back. If she failed to pay it, it would be because she was dead. For she could not survive a comparison between herself and her mother. Here in Naples she might find something, an opportunity. She spoke French and Italian fluently; and in this crowded season of the year it would not be difficult to find a situation as a maid or companion. So long as she could earn a little

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honestly, she was not afraid. She was desperately resolved.

Such a dinner! Long would she remember it; and longer still, how little either of them ate of it! She knew enough about these things to appreciate it. It must have cost a pretty penny. She smiled, she laughed, she jested; and always a battle to dam the uprising tears.

The dining-room was filled; women in beautiful evening gowns and men in sober black. But the two young people were oblivious. Their fellow-diners, however, bent more than one glance in their direction. Ill-fitting clothes, to be sure, but it was observed that they ate to the manner born. The girl was beautiful in a melancholy way, and the young man was well-bred and pleasant of feature, though oddly burned.

Coffee. George produced the cable. It was still sealed.

"You read it first," he said, passing it across the table.

Her hands shook as she ripped the sealed flap and opened the message. She read. Her eyes gathered dangerously.

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"Be careful!" he warned. "You've been brave so long; be brave a little longer."

"I did not know that there lived such good and kindly men. Oh, thank him, thank him a thousand times for me. Read it." And she no longer cared if any saw her tears.

"Bring her home, and God bless you both.

"MORTIMER."

"I knew it!" he cried exultantly. "He and my father were the finest two men in the world. The sky is all clear now."

"Is it?" sadly. "Oh, I do not wish to pain you, but it is charity; and I am too proud."

"You refuse?" He could not believe it.

"Yes. But when things grow dark, and the day turns bitter, I shall always remember those words. I can see no other way. I must fight it out alone."

Love makes a man dumb or eloquent; and as George saw all his treasured dreams fading swiftly, eloquence became his buckler in this battle of love unspoken and pride in arms. Each time he paused for breath, she shook her head slowly.

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The diners were leaving in twos and fours, and presently they were all alone. Servants were clearing up the tables; there was a clatter of dishes and a tread of hurrying feet. They noted it not.

"Well, one more plea!" And he swept aside his self-imposed restrictions. "Will you come for my sake? Because I am lonely and want you? Will you come for my sake?"

This time her head did not move.

"Is it pity?" she whispered.

"Pity!" His hands gripped the linen and the coffee-cups rattled. "No! It is not pity. Because you were lonely, because you had no one to turn to, I could not in honor tell you. But now I do. Fortune, will you come for my sake, because I love you and want you always and always?"

"I shall come."

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CHAPTER XX

MARCH HARES

GEORGE, in that masterful way which was not wholly acquired, but which had been a latency till the episodic journey—George paid for the dinner, called the head-waiter and thanked him for the attention given it, and laid a generous tip upon the cover. From the dining-room the two young people, outwardly calm but inwardly filled with the Great Tumult, went to the manager's bureau and arranged for Fortune's room. This settled, Fortune went down to the cavernous entrance to bid George good night. They were both diffident and shy, now that the great problem was solved. George was puzzled as to what to do in bidding her good night, and

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Fortune wondered if he would kiss her right here, before all these horrid cab-drivers.

"I shall call for you at nine," he said. "We've got to do some shopping."

A tinkle of laughter.

"These ready-made suits are beginning to look like the deuce."

"Do you always think of everything?"

"Well, what I don't remember, the clerk will," slyly. "Till recently I believe I never thought of anything. I must be off. It's too cold down here for you." He offered his hand nervously.

She gave hers freely. He looked into her marvelous eyes for a moment. Then he turned the palm upward and kissed it, lightly and loverly; and she drew it across his face, over his eyes, till it left in departing a caress upon his forehead. He stood up, breathing quickly, but not more so than she. A little tableau. Then he jammed his battered fedora upon his head and strode up the Corso. He dared not turn. Had he done so, he must have gone back and taken her in his arms. She followed him with brave eyes; she saw him suddenly veer across the street and pause at the

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parapet. It was then that she became conscious of the keenness of the night-wind. She went in. Somehow, all earth's puzzles had that night been solved.

George lighted a cigar, doubtless the most costly weed to be found in all Naples that night. The intermittent glowing of the end faintly outlined his face. Far away across the shimmering bay rose Capri in a kind of magic, amethystine transparency. A light or two twinkled where Sorrento lay. His gaze roved the half-circle, and finally rested upon the grim dark ash-heap, Vesuvius. Beauty, beauty everywhere; beauty in the sky, beauty upon earth, in his heart and mind. He was twenty-eight, and all these wonderful things had happened in a little more than so many days!

"God's in His heaven,
All's right with the world!"

He flung the half-finished cigar into the air, careless as to where it fell, or that in falling it might set Naples on fire. It struck a roof somewhere below; a sputter of sparks, and all was dark again.

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"I shall come." All through his dreams that night he heard it. "I shall come."

Next morning he notified the captain to retain their cabins. After that they proceeded to storm the shops. They were like March hares; irresponsible children, both of them. What did propriety matter? What meaning had circumspection? They two were all alone; the rest of the world didn't count. It never had counted to either of them. Certainly they should have gone to a parsonage; Mrs. Grundy would prudently have suggested it. The trivialities of convention, however, had no place at that moment in their little Eden. They were a law unto themselves.

Into twenty shops they went; *modiste* after *modiste* was interviewed; and Fortune at length found two models. These were pretty, and, being models, quite inexpensive. Once, George was forced to remain outside in the carriage. It was in front of the *lingerie* shop. He put away each receipt, just like a husband upon his honeymoon. Later, receipts would mean as much, but from a different angle of vision. He bought so many violets that the carriage looked as though it were

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ready for the flower carnival. He laughingly disregarded her protests. It was the Song of Songs.

"My shopping is done," she said at last, dropping the bundles upon the carriage floor. "Now, it is your turn."

"You have forgotten a warm steamer-cloak," he reminded her.

"So I have!"

This oversight was easily remedied; and then George sought the tailor-shops for ready-made clothes. He had more difficulty than Fortune; ready-made suits were not the easiest things to find in Naples. By noon, however, he had acquired a Scotch woolen for day wear and a fairly decent dinner suit, along with other necessities.

"Well, I say!" he murmured, struck by a revealing thought.

"Have you forgotten anything?"

"No. On the contrary, I've just remembered something. I've got all *I* need or want in my steamer-trunk; and till this minute I never once thought of it."

How they laughed! Indeed, so high were their spirits that they would have laughed at any in-

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consequent thing. They lunched at the Gambrinus, and George mysteriously bought up all the pennies from the hunchback tobacco vendor. Later, as they bowled along the sea-front, George created a small riot by flinging pennies to small boys and whining beggars. At five they went aboard the ship, which was to leave at sundown, some hours ahead of scheduled time. The captain himself welcomed them as they climbed the swaying ladder. There were a hundred first-class passengers for the final voyage. The two, however, still sat at the right and left of the captain; but the table was filled, and they maintained a guarded prattle. Every one at once assumed that they were a bridal couple, and watched them with tolerant amusement. The captain had considerately left their names off the passenger-list as published for the benefit of the passengers and the saloon-sitting. So they moved in a sort of mystery which rough weather prevented being solved.

One night, when the sea lay calm and the air was caressingly mild, George and Fortune had gone forward and were leaning over the starboard-rail where it meets and joins the forward beam-

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rail. They were watching for the occasional flicker of phosphorescence. Their shoulders touched, and George's hand lay protectingly over hers.

"I love you," he said; "I love you better than all the world."

"Are you sure?"

"Sure? Can you doubt it?"

"Sometimes."

"Why . . . "

But she interrupted him quickly. "In all this time you have never asked me if I love you. Why haven't you?"

"I have been afraid."

"Ask me!"

"Do you love me?" his heart missing a beat.

She leaned toward him swiftly. "Here is my answer," pursing her lips.

"Fortune!"

"Be careful! I've a terrible temper."

But she was not quite prepared for such roughness. She could not stir, so strongly did he hold her to his heart. Not only her lips, but her eyes, her cheeks, her throat, and again her lips. He hurt her, but her heart sang. No man could

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imitate love like that; and doubt spread its dark pinions and went winging out to sea.

"That is the way I want to be loved. Always love me like that. Never wait for me to ask. Come to me at all times, no matter how I am engaged, and take me in your arms, roughly like this. Then I shall know. I have been so lonely; my heart has been so filled with love and none to receive it! I love you. I haven't asked why; I don't care. When it began I do not know either. But it is in my heart, strong and for ever."

"Heart o' mine, I'm going to be the finest lover there ever was!"

The great ship came up the bay slowly. It was a clear, sparkling, winter day, and the towering minarets of business stood limned against the pale-blue sky with a delicacy not unlike Japanese shell-carving. A thousand thousand ribbons of cheery steam wavered and slanted and dartled; the river swarmed with bustling ferries and eager tugs; and great floats of ice bumped and jammed about the invisible highways.

"This is where *I* live," said George, running his

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arm under hers. "The greatest country in the world, with the greatest number of mistaken ideas," he added humorously.

"What is it about the native land that clutches at our hearts so? I am an American, and yet I was born in the south of France. I went to school for a time near Philadelphia. America, America! Can't I be an American, even if I was born elsewhere?"

"You can never be president," he said gravely.

"I don't want to be president!" She snuggled closer to him. "All I want to be is a good man's wife; to watch the kitchen to see that he gets good things to eat; to guard his comforts; to laugh when he laughs; to be gentle when he is sad; to nurse him when he is ill; to be all and everything to him in adversity as well as in prosperity: a true wife." She touched his sleeve with her cheek. "And I don't want him to think that he must always be with me; if he belongs to a man-club, he must go there once in a while."

"I am very happy," was all he could say.

"George, I am uneasy. I don't know why. It's my mother, my uncle, and Horace. I am going

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to meet them somewhere. I know it. And I worry about you."

"About me? That's foolish." He smiled down at her.

"Ah, why did my mother seek to renew the acquaintance with you? Why did Horace have you kidnapped into the desert? There can be no such a thing as the United Romance and Adventure Company. It is a cloak for something more sinister."

"Pshaw! What's the use of worrying, little woman? Whatever schemes they had must be out of joint by now. Sometimes I think I must be dreaming, little girl."

"I am not little. I'm almost as tall as you are."

"You are vastly taller in many ways."

"Don't be too sure. I am human; I have my moods. I am sometimes crotchety; sometimes unjust and quick of temper."

"All right; I want you, temper and all, just the same."

"But will they like me? Won't they think I'm an adventuress, or something like that?"

"Bless your heart, not in a thousand years! I'm

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a pretty wise man in some ways, and they know it."

And so it proved to be. Both Mr. and Mrs. Mortimer greeted them at the pier in Hoboken. One glance at the face of the girl was sufficient. Mrs. Mortimer held out her arms. It was a very fine thing to do.

"I was in doubt at first," she said frankly. "George is so guileless. But to look at you, my child, would scatter the doubts of a Thomas. Will you let me be your mother, if only for a little while?" with a wise and tender smile.

Shyly Fortune accepted the embrace. Never had she been so happy. Never had she felt arms like these about her.

"What did he cable you?" she asked in a whisper.

"That he loved you and wanted me to mother you against that time when he might have the right to take you as his own. Has he that right?"

"Yes. And oh! he is the bravest and tenderest man I know; and below it all he is only a boy."

Mrs. Mortimer patted her hand. A little while later all four went over to the city and drove up-

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town to the Mortimer home. On the way Fortune told her story, simply, without avoiding any essential detail. And all her new mother did was to put an arm about her and draw her closer.

The Mortimer home was only three blocks away from George's. So, when dinner was over, George declared that he would run over and take a look at his own house. He wanted to wander about the rooms a bit, to fancy how it would look when Fortune walked at his side. He promised to return within an hour. He had forgotten many things, ordinarily important; such as wiring his agent, his butler and cook, who were still drawing their wages. He passed along the street above which was his own. He paused for a moment to contemplate the great banking concern. And the president of this bank was the elder brother of Ryanne! Lots of queer kinks in the world; lots of crooked turnings. He passed on, turned the corner, and strode toward his home, ecstasy thrilling his heart. Lightly he ran up the steps. Three doors below he noticed two automobiles. He gave them only a cursory glance. He took out his ring of keys, found the night-latch and

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thrust it into the keyhole. He never had believed in this putting up of iron-gates and iron-shutters. A night-latch and a caretaker who came round once a day was enough for any sensible person. He turned the key. Eh? It didn't seem to go round. He tried several times, but without success. Puzzled, he struck a match and stooped before the keyhole.

It was a new one.

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CHAPTER XXI

A BOTTLE OF WINE

GEORGE stood irresolutely upon the steps. A new keyhole! What the deuce did the agent mean by putting a new keyhole in the door without notifying him? As the caretaker never entered that door, it was all the agent's fault. There was no area-way in front, but between George's house and the next there was a court eight feet in width, running to the dividing wall between the bank property and his own. A grille gate protected this court. George had a key. The gate opened readily enough. His intention was to enter by the basement-door. But he suddenly paused. To his amazement he saw just below the library curtain a thin measure of light. Light! Some one in the house! He did the most

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sensible thing possible: he stood still till the shock left him. Some one in the house, some one who had no earthly or heavenly business there! Near the window stood a tubbed bay-tree. Cautiously he mounted this, holding the ledge of the window with his fingers. That he did not instantly topple over with a great noise was due to the fact that he was temporarily paralyzed.

Here was the end of the puzzle. The riddle of the United Romance and Adventure Company was solved. At last he understood why Mrs. Chedsoye had sought him, why Ryanne had kidnapped him. But for his continuing his journey upon the German-Lloyd boat, he would have come home a week too late; he would have missed being a spectator (already an innocent contributor) to one of the most daring and ingenious bank-robberies known in the pages of metropolitan crime. There was Mrs. Chedsoye, intrusively handsome as ever; there was her rascally card-sharper brother, that ingrate who called himself Ryanne, and three unknown men. The impudence of it; the damnable insolence of it! And there they were, toasting their success in a brace

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of his own vintage-champagne! But the wine was, after all, inconsequential. It was what he saw upon the floor that caught him by the throat. His knees weakened, but he held on grimly to his perch.

White bags of gold, soiled bags of gold, and neat packets of green and yellow notes: riches! Twenty bags and as many packets of currency; a million, not a penny under that! George was seized with a horrible desire to yell with laughter. He felt the cachinnations bubble in his throat. He swallowed violently and gnawed his lips. They had got into his house under false pretenses and had tunneled back into the Merchant-Mechanic Bank, of which Horace's brother was president and in which he, George P. A. Jones, always carried a large private balance! It was the joke of the century.

As quietly as he possibly could, he stepped down from his uncertain perch. In the fine fury that followed his amazement, his one thought was to summon the police at once, to confront the wretches in their villainy; but once outside in the street, he cooled. Instantly he saw the trial in court. Fortune as witness against her own

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mother. That was horrible and not to be thought of. But what should he do? He was shaken to his soul. The stupendous audacity of such a plan! To have worked out every detail, down to the altering of the keyhole to prevent surprise! He saw the automobiles. They were leaving that night. If he acted at all, it must be within an hour; in less than that time they would be loading the cars. His mind began to rid itself of its confusion. Without the aid of the police; and presently he saw the way to do it.

He was off at a dog-trot, upon the balls of his feet, silently. Within five minutes he was mounting the steps to the Mortimer home, and in another minute was inside. The others saw directly that something serious had happened.

"What's the trouble, George? House vanished?" asked Mortimer.

"Have you got a brace of revolvers?" said George quietly.

"Two automatics. But . . . "

"Give them to me," less evenly in tone. "Will you call up Arthur Wadsworth, president of the Merchant-Mechanic Bank?"

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"The bank?"

"Yes, the bank. You know, it is just in the rear of my house."

Here Fortune came forward. All the bright color was gone from her cheeks; the old mask of despair had re-formed. She needed no further enlightenment.

"Are you going back there?" she asked.

"Yes, dear; I must. Mr. Mortimer will go with me."

"And I?"

"No, heart o' mine; you've got to stay here."

"If you do not take me with you, you will not find me here when you return."

"My child," began Mortimer soothingly, "you must not talk like that. There will be danger."

"Then notify the police, and let the danger rest upon their shoulders," she said, her jaws set squarely.

"I can't call in the police," replied George, miserable.

"Shall I tell you why?"

"Dearest, can't you understand that it is you I am thinking of?"

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"I am determined. If I do not go with you, you shall never see me again. My mother is there!"

Tragedy. Mrs. Mortimer stretched out a hand, but the girl did not see it. Her mother; her own flesh and blood! Oh, the poor child!

"Come, then," said George, in despair. "But you are hurting me, Fortune."

"Forgive me, but I *must* go with you. I *must!*"

"Get me the revolvers, Mr. Mortimer. We'll wait for Wadsworth. Will you please telephone him? I'm afraid I couldn't talk steadily enough. Explain nothing save that it concerns his bank."

George sat down. Not during those early days of the journey across the desert had he felt so pitiably weak and inefficient.

Fortune paced the room, her arms folded tightly across her breast. Strange, there was neither fear nor pain in her heart, only a wild wrath.

When Mortimer returned from the telephone, saying that Wadsworth would be right over, he asked George to explain fully what was going on. It was rather a long story. George managed to get through it with a coherency understandable,

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but no more. Mrs. Mortimer put her motherly arms about the girl, but she found no pliancy. There was no resistance, but there was that stiffness peculiar to felines when picked up under protest. And there was a little more than the cat in Fortune then; the tigress. She was not her mother's daughter for nothing. To confront her, to overwhelm her with reproach, to show her not the least mercy, stonily to see her led away to prison!

George inspected the revolvers carefully to see if they were loaded.

The bell rang, and Arthur Wadsworth came in. Mortimer knew him; George did not. He drew his interest as it fell due and deposited it in another bank. That was the extent of his relations with Arthur Wadsworth, president of the Merchant-Mechanic Bank of New York.

Arthur was small, thin, blond like his brother, but the hair was so light upon the top of his head that he gave one the impression that he was bald. His eyes looked out from behind half-shut lids; his cheeks were cadaverous; his pale lips met in a straight, unpleasant line. There was not the

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slightest resemblance between the two brothers, either in their bodies or in their souls. George recognized this fact immediately. He disliked the man instinctively, just as he could not help admiring his rogue of a brother.

"I want you to go with me to my house at once," began George.

"Please explain."

George disliked the voice even more than the man himself. "Everything will be explained there," he replied.

"This is very unusual," the banker complained.

"You will find it so. Come." George moved toward the hall, the revolvers in his coat-pocket.

"But I insist . . . "

"Mr. Wadsworth, everything will be fully explained to you the moment you enter my house. More I shall not tell you. You are at liberty to return home."

"It concerns the bank?" The voice had something human in it now; a note of affection.

Arthur Wadsworth loved the bank as a man loves his sweetheart, but more explicitly, as a miser loves the hoard hidden in the stocking. He

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loved every corner of the building. He worshiped the glass-covered marbles over which the gold passed and repassed. He adored the sight of the bent backs of the bookkeepers, the individual-account clerks, the little cages of the paying and receiving tellers, always so beautifully littered with little slips of paper, packets of bills, stacks of gold and silver; he loved the huge steel-vault, stored with bags of gold and bundles of notes, bonds, and stocks. Money was his god. Summed up, he was a miser in all that contemptible word implies: stingy, frugal, cautious, suspicious, sly, cruel, and relentless; he was in the concrete what his father had been in the abstract.

"It concerns the bank?" he repeated, torn by doubt.

George shrugged. "Let us be going."

"Will it be necessary to call in the police?"

"No."

"I suppose, then," said Wadsworth bitterly, wondering, too, over the strange animosity of this young man he did not know—"I suppose I must do just as you say?"

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"Absolutely." George's teeth came together with a click.

The four of them passed out of the house, each singularly wrought with agitation. Fortune walked ahead with George. Neither spoke. They could hear the occasional protest from the banker into Mortimer's ear; but Mortimer did not open his lips. They came to the house, and then George whispered his final instructions to Wadsworth. The latter, when he understood what was taking place, became wild with rage and terror; and it was only because George threatened to warn the conspirators that he subsided.

"And," went on George, "if you do not obey, you can get out of it the best you know how. Now, silence, absolute silence."

He pressed back the grille gate, and the others tiptoed after him.

Ryanne tipped the third bottle delicately. Not a drop was wasted. How the golden beads swarmed up to the brim, to break into little essences of perfume! And this was good wine; twelve years in the bottle.

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"It's like some dream; eh?"

Wallace smacked his lips loudly.

"Wallace," chided Ryanne, "you always drink like a sailor. You don't swallow champagne; you sip it, like this."

Major Callahan swayed his glass back and forth under his nose. "Smells like a vineyard after a rain."

"There's poetry for you!" laughed the butler.

Mrs. Chedsoye alone seemed absorbed in other things. She was trying to discover what it was that gave this supreme moment so flat a taste. It was always so; it was the chase, the goal was nothing. It was the excitement of going toward, not arriving at, the destination. Was she, who considered herself so perfect, a freak after all, shallow like a hill-stream and as aimless in her endeavors? Had she possessed a real enthusiasm for anything? She looked back along the twisted avenue of years. Had anything really stirred her profoundly? From the bags of gold her glance strayed up and over to Ryanne. Love? Love a man so weak that he could not let be the bottle? She had a horror of drunkenness, the inane

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giggles, the attending nausea; she had been through it all. Had she loved him, or was it because he loved the child? Even this she could not tell. Inwardly she was opaque to her searchings. She stirred restlessly. She wanted to be out of this house, on the way. The gold, as gold, meant nothing. She had enough for her needs. What was it, then? Was she mad? What flung her here and about, without real purpose?

"We could have taken every dollar from the vault," said Wallace cheerfully.

"But we couldn't have made our get-away with it," observed the butler, holding his empty glass toward Ryanne, who was acting as master of ceremonies.

"A clear, unidentified million," mused Ryanne. "Into the cars with it; over to Jersey City; on to Philadelphia; but there for Europe; quietly transfer the gold to the various Continental banks; and in six months, who could trace hair or hide of it?" Ryanne laughed.

"It's all right to laugh," said the Major. "But are you sure about Jones? He could have arrived this afternoon."

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"Impossible! He left Alexandria for Naples on a boat that stopped but thirty hours. With Fortune on his hands he could not possibly sail before the following week, and maybe not then. Sit tight. I know what I am talking about."

"He might cable."

"So he might. But if he had we'd have heard from him before now. I'm going to tell you a secret. My name is not Ryanne."

"We all know that," said the Major.

"It's Wadsworth. Does that tickle your mind any?"

The men shook their heads. Mrs. Chedsoye did not move hers.

"Bah! Greatest joke of the hour. I'm Horace Wadsworth, and Arthur Wadsworth, president of the Merchant-Mechanic Bank, is my beloved brother!"

"Ay, damnable wretch!"

A shock ran through them all. In the doorway leading to the rear hall stood George, his revolvers leveled steadily. Peering white-faced over his shoulder was the man who had spoken, Arthur Wadsworth.

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CHAPTER XXII

THE END OF THE PUZZLE

THE elder brother tried to push past George, but old Mortimer caught him by the shoulders and dragged him back.

"Let me go!" he cried, his voice nasal and high. "Do you hear me? Let me go!"

"Mr. Mortimer," said George, without turning his head or letting his eye waver, "keep him back. Thanks." George stepped over the threshold. "Now, gentlemen, I shall shoot the first man who makes a movement."

And Ryanne, who knew something about George, saw that he meant just what he said. "Steady, every one," he said. "My friend George here can't shoot; but that kind of a man is deadliest with a pistol. I surrender."

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The brother was struggling. "The telephone! The telephone! I demand to call the police. This is accessory to the fact! I tell you, let me go!"

"Mr. Wadsworth," replied George, "if you do not be still and let me run this affair, I'll throw the pistols to the floor, and your brother and his friends may do as they bally please. Now, step back and be quiet. Stop!" to Ryanne, whose hand was reaching out toward the table.

"Don't shoot, Percival; I want only a final glass of wine." Ryanne calmly took the slender stem of the glass between his fingers, lifted it and drank. He set it down empty. From his outside pocket he drew a handkerchief and delicately dried his lips. He alone of his confederates had life. It was because he alone understood. Prison wasn't staring them in the face just yet. "Well, Arthur, old top, how goes it? Nearly got your money-bags, didn't we? And we surely would have but for this delicious vintage."

"Damn you and your wine!" roared the Major, shaking with rage. This adventure had been no joke to him, no craving for excitement. He wanted the gold, the gold. With what would

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have been his share he could have gambled at Monte Carlo and Ostend till the end of his days. For the first time he saw long, thick bars of iron running up and down a window. And all for a bottle of wine!

"Damn away, old sport!" Ryanne reached for the bottle and filled his glass again. "Percival, I'm blamed sorry about that olive-tree of yours." He waved his hand toward the bags. "You can see that my intentions in regard to refunding that hundred pounds were strictly honorable. Now, what's on the ticket?"

"I suppose your luggage is outside in the automobiles?"

"Right-O!"

"Well, I need not explain my reasons; you will understand them; but I am going to give you all two hours' time. Then I shall notify the police. You will have to take your chance after that time."

The circling faces brightened perceptibly. Two hours—that would carry them far into Jersey.

"Accepted with thanks," said Ryanne.

"I refuse to permit it!" yelled the brother. "Mr.

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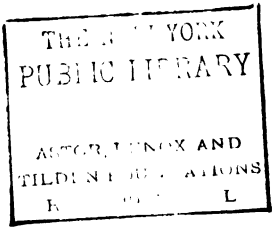

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Jones, you will rue this night's work. I shall see that the law looks into your actions. This is felony. I demand to be allowed to telephone."

"Percival, for heaven's sake, let him!" cried Ryanne wearily. "Let him shout; it will soften his voice. He will hurt nobody. The wires were cut hours ago."

Mortimer felt the tense muscles in his grasp relax. Arthur Wadsworth grew limp and reeled against the jamb of the door.

"You had better start at once," George advised. "You three first," with a nod toward Wallace (his bulbous nose now lavender in hue), the butler and the first-man. "Forward march, front door. Go on!"

"What about me?" asked Ryanne.

"In a moment." George could not but admire the man, rascal though he was. There was a pang of regret in his heart as the thought came and went swiftly: what a comrade this man would have made under different circumstances! Too late! "Halt!" he cried. The trio marching toward the door came to a stop, their heads turned inquiringly. "Here, Mr. Mortimer; take one of

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these guns and cover the Major. He's the one I doubt." Then George followed the others into the hall and ironically bade them God-speed as he opened the door for them. They went out stupidly; the wine had dulled them. George immediately returned to the library.

Neither Fortune nor her mother had stirred in all this time. A quality of hypnotism held them in bondage. The mother could not lower her glance and the daughter would not. If there was a light of triumph in Fortune's eyes, it was unconsciously there. And no one will know the full bitterness that shone from the mother's. She could have screamed with fury; she could have rent her clothes, torn her skin, pulled her hair; and yet she sat there without physical sign of the tempest. This offers a serio-comic suggestion; but it was tragedy enough for the woman who was in the clutch of these emotional storms. It was not her predicament; it was not that she was guilty of a crime against society; it was not that she had failed. No. It was because she, in leaving this house for ever, was leaving her daughter behind, mistress of it.

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On her side, Fortune knew, that, had there been a single gesture inviting pity, she must have flown to her mother's side. But there was no sign. Finally, Fortune stepped back, chilled. It was all too late.

"Fortune," said George, terribly embarrassed, "do you wish to speak to your mother, alone?"

"No." It was a little word, spoken in a little, hushed tone.

Mrs. Chedsoye rose and proceeded to put on her furs, which she had flung across the back of her chair.

"Mother!" This came in a gasp from the elder Wadsworth. An understanding of this strange proceeding began to filter through his mind. The young girl's mother!

Mrs. Chedsoye drew on her gloves slowly. She offered them to the Major to button. He flung the hands aside. He was not nice under the veneer. But Ryanne was instantly at her service. And curiously she watched his agile fingers at work over the buttons; they were perfectly steady. Then, followed by the Major and Ryanne, she walked easily toward the hall. Ryanne paused.

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"Good night, Arthur. I'm sure you will not sleep well. That handsome safe is irreparably damaged. I dare say you will find a way to cover the loss without any injury to your own pocket. Old top, farewell! Who was it, Brutus or Cæsar, who said: 'I go but to return'?" The banter left his face and voice swiftly. "You sneaking blackguard, you cheater of widows; yes, I shall come again; and then look to your sleek, sanctimonious neck! You chucked me down the road to hell, and the pity of it is, some day I must meet you there! Fortune, child," his voice becoming sad, "you might remember a poor beggar in your prayers to-night. Percival, a farewell to you. We shall never meet again. But when you stand upon that bally old rug there, you'll always see me, the fire, the tents, the camels and the desert, and the moon in the date-palms. By-by!"

And presently they were gone. A moment later those remaining could hear the chug-chug of the motors as they sped away. The banker was first to recover from the spell. He rushed for the hall, but George stopped him rudely.

"Two hours, if you please. I never break my

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word. Your money is all there. If you do not act reasonably, I'll throw you down and sit on you till the time is up. Sit down. I do not propose that my future wife shall appear in court as a witness against her mother. Do you understand me now?"

The banker signified that he did. He sat down, rather subdued. Then he got up nervously and inventoried the steal. He counted roughly a million. A million! He felt sick and weak. It would have wrecked the bank, wiped it out of existence. And saved by the merest, the most trifling chance! A bottle of wine! He resumed his chair and sat there wonderingly till the time-limit expired.

The public never heard how nearly the Merchant-Mechanic had gone to the wall; nor how six policemen had worked till dawn carrying back the gold; nor that the banker had not even thanked them for their labor. The first impulse of the banker had been to send the story forth to the world, to harass and eventually capture his brother; but his foresight becoming normal, he realized that silence was best, even if his brother

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escaped. If the depositors heard that the bank had been entered and a million taken from the vaults, there would naturally follow a terrific run.

When the last bag had been taken out of the library and the banker and the police had gone, the bell rang. George went to the door. A messenger handed him a small satchel and a note. There was to be no reply. The note was from Ryanne. Briefly it stated that the satchel contained the emeralds. There had been some difficulty in forcing the Major to surrender them. But that much was due to George for his generosity. Later in the day he—George—might inform his—Horace's—brother that the *coup* hadn't been a total fizzle. They had already packed away in suit-cases something like two hundred thousand dollars in bills of all denominations. "Tell that dear brother of mine to charge it to our account. It will be less than the interest upon a million in ten years. To you, my boy, I add: Fortune favors the brave!"

"George," said Mortimer, "you will not mind if I forage round in the kitchen? A bottle of beer

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and a bit of cheese would go handy. It's almost my breakfast time."

"Bless your heart, help yourself!"

And George turned to Fortune.

"Ah," she cried, seizing his hands, "you will not think ill of me?"

"And for what?" astonished.

"For not speaking to my mother. Oh, I just couldn't; I just couldn't! When I thought of all the neglect, all the indifference, the loneliness, I couldn't! It was horribly unnatural and cruel!"

"I understand, heart o' mine. Say no more about it." And he put his two hands against her cheeks and kissed her. "Never shall you be lonely again, for I am going to be all things to you. Poor heart! Just think that all that has passed has been only a bad dream, and that it's clear sunshiny morning; eh?" He held her off a ways and then swept her into his arms as he had done on board the ship, roughly and masterly. "And there's that old rug! Talk about magic carpets! There never was one just like this. But for it I shouldn't even have known you. And, by Jove! when the minister comes this afternoon . . . "

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"This afternoon!"

"Exactly! When he comes, you and I are going to stand upon that beautiful, friendly old rug, and both of us are going to be whisked right away into Eden."

"Please!"

Silence.

"How brave you are!"

"I? Oh, pshaw!"

"Would you have shot one of them?"

"Girl, your Percival Algernon couldn't have hit the broad side of a barn." He laughed joyously.

"I knew it. And that is why I call you brave."

And when the pale gold of winter dawn filled the room, it found them, hand in hand, staring down at the old Yhiordes, the magic old Yhiordes from Bagdad.

THE END

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